とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）17
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 17

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 17

An "Index Librorum Prohibitorum Callup Notice" was proclaimed by the Necessarius Archbishop of the Church of England, Laura Stuart. Inside is a duty to investigate, together with the royal family of England, the explosion that arose in the Eurotunnel which linked France and England.

Having received this order, Index and her guardian, Kamijou Touma, embarked upon a plane bound for England. Before they were to peacefully enjoy their trips in the skies, a mysterious figure on board the plane sets his hijacking plan into action...! While using all his strength to sooth the empty stomach of this silver-haired sister and attempting to resolve the situation at hand, how would the fate of Kamijou turn out!?

This round's misfortune shall thus start off in England!

か-12-19

とある魔術の禁書目録(インデックス)⑰

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Kamachi Kazuma

I was thinking about saying 'As I had made my debut in April 2004, well, this shall be the 5th anniversary!,' but as it turns out, it's published right at the month before: March. Even though it turned out like this, from now on, please take care of me like before.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~17
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

During the time when this volume will go on sale, I think the TV anime should be reaching its end as well? I wonder if there will be turns for characters like Fukiyose, Itsuwa and Kihara to appear? (Nope.)

カバー／箔印刷

とある魔術の禁書目録 インデックス 17

鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

[Curtana Second]

Passed on from generation to generation within the British Royal Family, this is a ceremonial sword that is used during coronation ceremonies. Even though it is a replica sword, the holder of this sword will still be able to acquire powers similar to that of archangel Michael. However, the "Curtana" that is currently being held by the British Queen Elizard is the second one. "Curtana Second" is a substitute of the "Original", and had been artificially created by the hands of the people of the "Royal Faction". The current whereabouts of the "Curtana Original" that had historically appeared at the very beginning, however, is unknown.

Prologue
There was once
a small town at a certain place.
A small town surrounded by walls,
the king and his people
lived in that city.
One day,
a dragon came to town
from the vicinity.
The king and the people
intended to defeat
the dragon together,
but failed.
The violent,
angry dragon spat fire,
raging in the city.
The king and the people,
to appease the dragon,
brought two sheep every day.
However, the number of sheep was limited.
When the sheep weren't enough,
the people sent a sheep and a child.

Finally was the turn
to offer the king's daughter,
the princess.
The king pleaded to the people
to let the princess go.
The people didn't agree
because they had already sent
their own children.
Thus,
the sheep and the princess
were sent to the home
of the dragon.
The princess grieved
for her own fate.
At this time,
a wandering knight
rode to her side
on a horse.
He wielded a holy sword
along with a lance,
and was a Knight
among the Knights.
His name,
supposedly,
was St. George.

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Prologue

There was once a small town at a certain place.

A small town surrounded by walls, the king and his people lived in that city.

One day, a dragon came to town from the vicinity.

The king and the people intended to defeat the dragon together, but failed.

The violent, angry dragon spat fire, raging in the city.

The king and the people, to appease the dragon, brought two sheep every day.

However, the number of sheep was limited.

When the sheep weren't enough, the people sent a sheep and a child.

The children began to disappear from the city.

Finally was the turn to offer the king's daughter, the princess.

The king pleaded to the people to let the princess go.

The people didn't agree because they had already sent their own children.

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At this time, a wandering knight rode to her side on a horse.

He wielded a holy sword along with a lance, and was a Knight among the Knights.

His name, supposedly, was St. George.

Chapter 1: The Incongruity of Casual Conversation.
Irregular_Spark.

Part 1

Morning of the 17th of October.

Even though not long ago the El Niño effect had caused the sweltering heat of the summer to have been delayed in its passing, a cold fog had descended upon London's Japanese Street.

In the morning rush hour, regardless of where you looked, there was a sea of people. As for why there was not one tourist there, even if you mentioned it, no-one would turn their head and respond. For everyone knew the reason.

The teenage girl from the Amakusa sect, Itsuwa, was also in that Japanese Street which was empty of tourists.

Like the Chinese and Indian streets, the main attraction of the Japanese Street would be 'food'. To be able to eat familiar food and speak a familiar language even in a foreign country, that was why people with the same language naturally gathered together, creating all sorts of cuisine.

In reality, faced with the enormous flow of people through Japanese Street, sushi restaurants, hotpot restaurants and other shops of all kinds had popped up alongside the streets.

The first floor of the apartment complex Itsuwa resided in had also become a bento shop. Not just the Japanese living in London, but also numerous busy British commuters, who had adopted the "convenience is luxury" creed, bought

lunches there. The strong point of the Japanese was “punctuality”; able to carry out shop business with the speed of a pit stop team in a Formula One race, they had earned the respect of the community.

In the past, Itsuwa too has been called to help out in the shop, but now she was not helping out. Her uniform was also different from that of the shop. The impression the Itsuwa in London gave out was charming with a hint of maturity. On top of Itsuwa’s beige sports shirt was a jacket like a short overcoat. She was wearing light brown, form-fitting pants. If you inspected her clothing more carefully, because she was from Necessarius, even though Itsuwa was underage, she would be able to go into a bar without needing to be interrogated by police. Right now, in the depths of the shop, Itsuwa was in the break room for the shop workers, staring at the Japanese writing displayed on her laptop screen.

[“The key to success in a long-distance relationship is to remain in the mind of your partner! Those who are as shallow as a shadow will break off the relationship!? Those who succeed and those who fail will be separated!!”]

Itsuwa scrolled down with a quivering finger, reading,

[“Rule of Success! Capturing tactics!? Use the overpowering charm of a woman and capture his heart!”]

Or something along those lines. At that moment, memories from a few days ago resurfaced in Itsuwa’s mind.

To protect Kamijou Touma, who had been viciously pursued by Acqua of the Back, Itsuwa had stayed close to Touma. After all her efforts, it had seemed to Itsuwa that the roughly halfway around the world distance between Britain and Japan had shortened a bit, as well as the distance between her and Touma… but who would have predicted that the reinstated female Pontiff of the Amakusa Church, Kanzaki Kaori, would have arrived out of nowhere! Not only had she caused a ruckus, but in the end the Saint had unleashed her “One-hit KO Secret Technique”…

E-Erotic Fallen Angel Costume…!! To prepare such a horrifying secret weapon, as expected of someone as formidable as the Priestess! To wear such a thing, wouldn’t all the memories of that battle against Acqua of the Back be gathered at one point…?

The frustrated Itsuwa gripped her head with both hands.

Looking at herself, who was only charming with a hint of maturity…to put it in other words, “an absolute flawless costume”. Itsuwa let out a disappointed sigh.

This is the unbridgeable divide between commoners and genius, huh. Just like how a normal magician can never aspire to become a Saint. That Tatemiya, calling me the “hidden giant breasts” was just him trying to comfort me, compared to Kanzaki of the “normal giant breasts”, I truly have no chance

It was painfully obvious to Itsuwa that, compared with the sensual curves of the breasts and butt of that long-haired ponytail wearing priestess, she was far out of her league. At this moment, Itsuwa almost gave up on the spot. Tentatively, to comfort her troubled heart, she reminded herself it was not as if there was already a special relationship between herself and Kamijou; at this level, everything would have been fine already. As they say, a teenage girl in love is blind in all aspects.

Hmph, not only does it accentuate her perfect bust, but to use the Erotic Fallen Angel costume as a lethal final blow… A bold strategy that unites soul, technique and body…the Pontiff is truly a formidable person. With just one move, I have been totally defeated. There is no chance for me to turn the game around now…

With a sigh of despair, Itsuwa’s eyes flickered towards the suspicious news webpages. Then her eyes fell upon it. In the “Weekly Mini News 10” section, separate from the usual news, she saw “that”.

[“The name of the legendary new product: Great Spirit Revealing Maid Set! Guaranteed to have an attack power only equaled by slicing apart the brains of a working class man in a Z pattern! Determine any delicate requests at this autumn sale!”]

In Itsuwa’s mind, time had frozen. Had she not been chasing after that Saint? No, was this not now the only chance to get ahead of the Saint? Faced by this once in a thousand years opportunity, Itsuwa fell silent as she thought about it…

“Ooohh... H-How could I ever think of wearing this sort of attire!!!”

Furiously, Itsuwa messed up her hair with her hands. She had chosen the rational

decision. However, suddenly hating herself, she collapsed on her desk. Perhaps hesitation in place of bravery was the difference between an ordinary and an extraordinary person? What if her hesitation was the proof of her inferiority? Faced with those thoughts, Itsuwa couldn't help herself and started to sob.

…Voices traveled from the ceiling of the break room,

"No~!! Itsuwa, we've already given you a push, waa~! No!!"

"Why don't we just buy the costume first and put it in a box in front of Itsuwa's room?"

"Substitute Supreme Ponti… No, wait, Tatemiya-san! You should have already gotten an idea of Itsuwa's measurements through the massage battle right?"

"Of course! To witness the battle between the Erotic Fallen Angel priestess and the Great Spirit Revealing Maid priestess, we need to shed some blood and sweat, too!"

"Okay guys, I think we should get back to work…"

…and other related whispers. Surprisingly, Itsuwa heard none of it.

——

Part 2

The rumored erotic fallen angel maid, Kanzaki Kaori, trembling as if she sensed a mysterious resentment from a long distance, shuddered slightly and looked troubled.

Presently, she was walking down the streets of the Buckingham Palace outskirts.

To Kanzaki - or rather, to the Anglican Church, one of Great Britain's three factions, this place which housed the Royal Family was an unfamiliar area. The other two factions, the clout of the Royal Family and Knights of England had too strong of an influence.

...Kanzaki had come here to collect some documents from the Ministry of Home Affairs that was near Buckingham Palace, but unexpectedly, she met someone familiar.

The leader of the knights, Knight Leader.

Looking somehow young, he was actually in his mid-30s - more than twice Kanzaki's own age. His well-kept blond hair, looks, body build, the quality of the suit worn, and even the dignified way of walking were stained with the format of royal castles and palaces.

By the way, Kanzaki wasn't really good at handling Knight Leader.

It was not because of the aristocratic atmosphere.

"As far as October's events are concerned, be it the evening party at Windsor Castle or the onboard party at Liverpool, the best would be Senator James's birthday party along with the ball at the Queen's House, I suppose. The guests may be rowdy, but to save the face of the guest of honour, there shouldn't be any men harassing women in secluded places. If something happened because of the party, it will bring disgrace to Senator James."

"Well, that, umm..."

Holding that large envelope containing the documents, Kanzaki looked flustered.

Seeing this woman's face, Knight Leader frowned slightly.

"Hm. If it comes to a higher class then, you can go for the Halloween disguise ball held at the Buckingham Palace, but at the first party, you need to conceal your face and name. Or do you not like the audience? If you can't stand the lewd stares from them, then a far place like Edinburgh would be a perfect invitation..."

"... L-Like I said, that's not the case..."

As if she had something difficult to say, Kanzaki averted her eyes from Knight Leader.

"I-In the first place, this kind of evening party or ball dance that you mentioned is... feels like something like a date, right...? Somehow, as the leader of a group that’s working under the Anglican Church, it’s better for me to avoid this..."

"However,"

Knight Leader interrupted.

"In the first place, weren’t you the one who asked me to teach you British manners?"

"T-That..."

In the midst of the numerous people going back and forth from work and school, Kanzaki murmured something as she stood still.

Knight Leader put a puzzled expression on his face while watching this situation.

"I am sorry for delaying the meeting, but regarding that, I had to take care of it till the end, that is true. Certainly, please ask me about the mannerisms of the high-class society as much as you need to."

"N-no, that was when I came to England. Because of the Amakusa-Style's ceremonial methods, I had to learn the British etiquette and geography. Otherwise, I might not be able to fit into the high-class society."

Needless to say, with the help from a fellow Japanese, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, she not only already learned the basics of English, but also studied the dialects of various places in England. There was nothing she could learn from Knight Leader now.

"However, you actually don't appear much, be it at evening parties or balls. Perhaps it's because you don't do well with nobles?"

"... As a member of the Anglican Church, I don't feel a necessity to attend, let alone get familiar with them."

"It isn’t contradictory to walk on the right path and try to showcase the elegance of a lady. Also, beauty and tomfoolery do not share the same meaning. If you are perfect to that extent, you will still be perfect wherever you go. Wouldn't it be like the legend of Saint Agnes who was brought into a brothel, and with a flash of a shining light it turned into a missionary? Doesn’t that show the strength of the heart?"

"... Using brothels as an example, you're still inviting me even after being aware that an evening party is dangerous to females?"

(There's also that invitation to a ball with a flower from him while I was absent)... sighed Kanzaki.

Seeing that reaction, for some reason, Knight Leader tilted his head.

"Speaking about that, isn't this the first time you're asking about the ways of life as a lady?"

"Where did that rumour come from?"

"Hm, how weird. So that Erotic Maid Fallen Angel was a rumour...?"

Hearing Knight Leader mutter those words to himself, "GOBAHAA!!" Kanzaki let out an exasperated breath.

"That is not a lady-like behaviour."

"Wa, w-w-w-w-w-w-what are you...!?"

"Well, as a British gentleman, it would be a lie if I were to say that I am not interested in erotica and maids... but a fallen angel is unacceptable. A lady’s beauty must not be measured based on the bewitching exterior. Rather, it is the inner persona which must be beautiful--"

"Please wait. Please wait a minute! Please hear me out a bit!! That was just a brief irregular phenomenon, it is not like I am planning to wear that stupid costume again in the future!!"

Part 3

Completely ignorant of that dangerous conversation, a completely normal and unfortunate high school student with spiky hair, Kamijou Touma, had just finished his last lesson for the day and was enjoying the short break before homeroom began.

He was in Japan's Academy City.

That was a psychic power development institution that covered a third of Tokyo and had just under 2.3 million residents. It was a city of students with schools at every turn and the preparations for the large cultural festival held in November, the Ichihanaransai, were approaching like small waves announcing the coming festival. As the midterm exams had been cancelled due to various circumstances, the students must have felt they had more spare effort to put into the festival.

The students had formed small groups around the classroom and seemed to be in a fairly festive mood. Two primary examples were Aogami Pierce and Tsuchimikado Motoharu who were next to Kamijou.

"Yeah, the high school Ichihanaransai just seems different from when we were in middle school. We get a much bigger budget and there are so many more things we can do."

"Nyah. They're having the festival double as an open campus time, so they've gotta give a lotta money to places that aren't very proactive. And our school is really mediocre and doesn't have any of that burning desire or anything."

Those two quickly got off the topic of money and a female student who had black hair, a large forehead, large breasts, and always had to be on the committee in charge of events (and not because she had a thing for a guy on the committee), Fukiyose Seiri, crossed her arms and snorted.

"Now that the world's largest cultural festival, the Ichihanaransai, is coming, my season is finally here. If you people are just going to waste time, could you do something worthwhile instead? You might find a new side to yourselves. …Hey, you! Mr. Pointy Hair who is rolling up eraser crumbs and playing with them!!"

Kamijou Touma jumped at being singled out.

"E-ehhh? I don't need a new me. And I'm sure all I'd find out was that I had

always thought I loved maids but it was actually waitresses I loved.”

“Nyaah!! That’s a very serious matter!! Did you forget that a maid can do the job of a waitress, but a waitress can’t do the job of a maid!?”

“Heh…you fool. There’s no rule saying someone who loves maids can’t fall in love with waitresses. However, there’s nothing wrong with the pure feelings causing one to stand up for the honor of one’s favorite genre,” added Aogami.

The three different reactions from the three different idiots trampled on Fukiyose’s responsible spirit that was burning with excitement over the coming festival and she exploded as usual.

“I’m telling you to change that messed-up way of thinking, you stupid moronic idiots!!”

“Actually, this kind of discussion is necessary to determine whether a normal café or a maid café would be bett—gkh!!”

As Kamijou replied, he was knocked back with a head butt.

He rolled across the floor and finally came to a stop near his classmate Himegami Aisa’s seat. She also had long black hair (but not the large breasts) and she was flipping through the pages of a thick book with a serious expression on her face.

Kamijou stood up and wondered what she was reading, so he tried to follow the small print with his eyes over her shoulder.

“So that you are not buried among those with overflowing power, you need to emit a light that pushes the others aside. That’s right, you need attack power. And the one certain way to get that attack power is with individuality. Having some kind of special ability is best, but, if that’s too difficult on short notice, you can always join a school club or committee. Just by changing the rhythm of your lifestyle, you can change yourself inside and out.”

“……”

Kamijou Touma’s questioning eyes turned to Himegami’s back.

“…Hey. If there’s something bothering you, you can talk with me about it.”

“No thank you. I will deal with this alone.”

“I-I see. But let me give you one piece of advice. I’d say you have a peaceful bit of individuality in your excellent cooking skills.”

“!?”

“Hah hah hah. Isn’t making your own bento everyday quite a bit of attack power already? I cook for myself too, but you’re miles ahead of me.”

“A-are you saying…that what I wished for was within me all along…?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“My era starts now. I will use magic bentos to put an end to the era where I was the expressionless person shoved to the side…”

“U-umm…yeah, I guess…?”

And then their homeroom teacher, Tsukuyomi Komoe, entered the classroom.

“Okay, it’s time for homeroom. Today we’re going to decide everyone’s role for the Ichihanaransai. Anyone who is going to put precedence on their club or committee activities, please notify me.”

“…”

Himegami Aisa suddenly stopped moving.

That teacher was 135 cm tall, looked around 12 years old, looked like she should be wearing a randoseru and yet couldn’t resist beer and cigarettes, had undergone special studies on the topics of pyrokinesis and a variety of other powers, and her earnest research on AIM diffusion fields earned her special treatment even among the scientists. She didn’t just have one or two bits of individuality; she was an irregular monster made up of nothing but individuality in every aspect. And now Himegami had seen all of that once again.

“…Ahh.”

“H-Himegami? Why did you just collapse into dark despair? Himegami? Himegamiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!”

Her shoulders trembled and she did not respond.

Part 4

Misaka Mikoto was feeling restless.

She was in a shopping district during the period where twilight had mostly reached night. She wasn’t out later than usual; the change of season had changed the daylight hours. It wouldn’t be long before they moved up the time when everyone had to have left school.

The reason for her restlessness was clear.

(…I-I can’t believe I said that!! I wasn’t thinking of the consequences at all when I said that!!)

Replaying in her head was the conversation between her and the boy with the spiky hair that had occurred in District 22, Academy City’s largest underground mall.

At the time, it had looked like Kamijou Touma was going to die and yet he was still dragging his near-dead body to stand in the center of some incident. As such, Mikoto hadn’t been able to remain calm. In an attempt to stop him, she had willingly and selflessly blurted out all the words in her heart.

(Th-this is bad. When I think about it, the area around my armpit feels really itchy! This is bad!!)

Her roommate Shirai Kuroko had grown suspicious of how Mikoto had been writhing around for the past few days, but the one thing that had saved her (although it may been due to her own defenses) was that she hadn't run into Kamijou around the city.

If she met him now, she felt sure she would pass out.

She was planning on waiting for her to take care of the problem in her heart and then meeting him once she could do it the same as usual.

But then…

"Hm? Oh, it's Biri Biri. What are you doing here?"

"!!!???"

Mikoto gave a large start at the voice that suddenly called out to her from behind.

She cautiously turned around and saw a head of spiky hair.

"Wh-what? Do you have a problem with the things I do? I'm just kicking the vending machine like usual!!"

"Um, well, that is kind of a problem," responded Kamijou dejectedly.

Mikoto tilted her head questioningly.

…It wasn't as bad as she had thought it would be.

She had gone over it in her head again and again, and she thought she would die from embarrassment once she ran into him. Even if Kamijou hadn't said anything, she had expected to make it incredibly awkward on her own.

However, it was nothing much now that it was here.

In fact, she finally felt relief about the conversation from a few days back.

"Um…are your injuries okay?"

"Yeah, more or less. Ah, I see… My consciousness was kind of in and out back

then, so I don’t remember too much, but you really did know.”

Kamijou had a slightly lonesome expression on his face.

Mikoto didn’t think she had ever seen that look on his face before.

“It’d be a huge help if you didn’t tell anyone else about that. My memories are just gone, so making a big deal about it isn’t going to change anything. I’m just living my normal life, so I’d prefer if we could just go on like we always have.”

“I-I see.”

While Mikoto’s feelings were still a jumbled mess, Kamijou changed the subject.

She wasn’t able to follow the quickly changing conversation (or at least that’s how it felt to Mikoto whose head was spinning its wheels making no progress).

“Oh, and about the vending machine. You should be a little more careful about kicking so high in front of people while wearing a skirt. Even if you have shorts on underneath, we can still see all the way up your thighs.”

“…”

“Huh? …It’s surprisingly honest of you to actually put change into the vending machine, Misaka.”

Mikoto couldn’t say anything in response to that. Just when she had thought she had built up thick defensive walls around her heart, she found out they were made of sponge so they did nothing but soak up water. Mikoto’s eyes began spinning.

“Wh-what’s gyoing on… This is where I usually reject him and run off. Why do I feel so... feel so comfortable here!?”

“Hah? Wait, why are you getting all biri biri? H-hey, you’re going out of control. You’re sending sparks everywhere…no, this is more than sparks. Did I do something wrong!?”

“Funya.”

“Funya? That’s not an answeee

“You’re clearly making fun of me.”

“No, I’m not,” immediately denied Kamijou.

He put his cheap school bag on the floor and decided to turn on the TV. A special 2 hour commercial was running. It seemed to be a collection of stories about miraculous rescues from around the world. It was currently talking about a British undersea operations unit that had rescued all 370 people trapped in a flooded undersea tunnel.

“…It’s getting pretty cold, isn’t it? The cat’s even got its winter coat, so maybe it’s about time I brought it out.”

“Wh-what!? Brought what out!? Ah!! Are you going to bring out the rumored fugu nabe!?”

“Don’t get worked up before you know what it is!! That may warm you up, but it would send our finances into an ice age!! I’m just saying it’s about time to bring out the kotatsu, Index-san.”

“What’s that? What do you put in a kotatsu nabe? Seahorse?”

“Get your mind off of food, Index. This is what a kotatsu is!!”

As Kamijou yelled, he pulled that combination of a futon and a table from a small storage space along the wall. He set it in the center of the room in place of the glass table and Index started trembling.

“Kaki peanuts!!”

“The snacks on top of the kotatsu aren’t the point!! Please, just stick your legs under it! Then you can experience the wonder of special Japanese-made heaters!!”

“?”

Index questioningly stuck her legs under the futon.

“Ahh… It makes me want to fall asleep.”

“It’s scary how it didn’t even take you 5 seconds to realize the truth behind a kotatsu, Index. But that sleepiness is a trap that brings on colds, so don’t lose to it.”

It seemed Index was enjoying the kotatsu. The cat sat in the very center of the kotatsu as if to announce, “This warm and cozy area is my palace!!”

(Good, good. After bringing it out so confidently, I didn’t want to have to explain it away as something she wouldn’t be able to understand because it’s just part of Japanese culture.)

As he was thinking, Kamijou stuck his own legs in the kotatsu.

Then Index reached over to the basket on top of the kotatsu and pulled out a bag of kaki peanuts looking half-asleep all the while. She opened the clear bag and…

“Here, this is your share, Touma.”

“…!?”

It was a miracle.

That girl who could not even make instant ramen (because she couldn’t wait 3 whole minutes when there was food before her eyes) had *passed food in her hand to him*!!

“What? Why do you look so surprised?”

“O-oh, no reason.”

“?”

Index looked a little suspicious, but it seemed her interest in the kotatsu won out. Perhaps in an attempt to resist the sleepiness, she took her legs out from within the kotatsu and then stuck her head inside to inspect the inside. Kamijou relaxed since he was glad she seemed to be enjoying it so much.

But then an odd noise came from Kamijou’s butt within the kotatsu.

That very instant, Index forcefully stood straight up while her head was inside

the kotatsu and she lifted it up with both hands like a barbell for weightlifting.

“Toumaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

“E-eeeeeeeeeeee!! I’m sorry, Index, that was my fault!! Please don’t swing the kotatsu down! The cat doesn’t like being on top of Sky Fortress Kotatsu!!”

That was when Kamijou’s house phone began ringing. In the age of cell phones, it was rather rare for the house phone to ring.

(Good, now I can get away from Index…no, wait. This could be an emergency message.)

Kamijou grabbed the receiver as he tried to pacify Index.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was on the other end of the line.

“Nyah. Kami-yan, are you free for a fairly long conversation?”

“Hah? You live next door. Why are you using the phone? You can just come on over.”

“Well, given the situation, I really have no choice. And this is rather rude for a time zone where dinner comes early.”

“I actually have a lot to pay you back for so…wait, what time is it!? Oh, crap! I haven’t made dinner yet!! Tsuchimikado, I’ve got something to do, so keep this short!!”

“Hm? Oh, I see, I see. But, well…Where should I begin? It’d be a bit too sudden to start with the Eurotunnel bombing. I really need to go back and explain the situation from before that first…”

“Keep it short!! Index has sensed that dinner is probably going to be late, and I can feel flames of anger wrapped around her!!”

“I see,” said Tsuchimikado in an unsatisfied way, “Then I’ll get right to the point. You need to come to England right now.”

…….

“Ah, um, uh… What?”

“I’ve prepared a plane for you. When you reach District 23, take the luggage from locker #3293 in the cloakroom at the international airport’s 3rd reception desk. Your passport and everything you need is in there. They’ll hand you the luggage if you show them your Academy City ID, so you just have to tell the receptionist that you’re Kamijou Touma.”

“Eh? W-wait! You cut too much out and I have no idea what’s going on!! England? Right now? There are tons of things you should be explaining!!”

“But Kami-yan, you’re the one that told me to keep it short.”

“Well, yes, but aren’t you being a little too blunt today!? And why do I need to go to England anyway? …Wait, I have a bad feeling about this. With Chioggia in Italy and Avignon in France, I get the feeling that bad things happen to me when I go overseas!! And this time it’s a country full of magic cabals and the headquarters of the Anglican Church!! There’s no way in hell I’m going there!!”

“Nn, Kami-yan. Your guesses aren’t too far off actually, but it’s too late.”

After those words, Kamijou heard a high-pitched clang from the veranda as if a metal pipe had fallen to the ground. Something must have been thrown over from the room next door.

Looking over, he saw a small can about the size of a can of hairspray.

He then heard the sound of gas leaking from it.

“Ubfh! Cough cough!! Knockout gas!?”

“Oh, right. One more thing. Don’t bad things happen to you whether you go overseas or not, Kami-yan?”

Kamijou wasn’t able to speak in order to provide a rebuttal to those words.

Kamijou and Index (+ the cat) were overcome with an excessive drowsiness as if from a full-body anesthetic and they were forcefully put to sleep.

Part 6

“The effects of the accidental explosion in the Eurotunnel connecting England and France have spread to the air routes. Due to a number of airplanes being mobilized to transport materials and personnel between the two countries, there are possible delays to the normal schedule. For detailed information on expected arrivals and departures, see the proper reception desk.”

Kamijou Touma awoke to that announcement.

He realized he was on a bench in the airport lobby.

“…Aren’t they being a little too dynamic this time?”

When he shook his oddly heavy head and stood up, he felt something crinkle in his hand. It was a small memo.

It read: “Nyah. It’s already too late for the last train and the last bus and I took everything out of your wallet, so you can’t use a taxi to get home. There’s some British currency in the luggage at the cloakroom, so use that and have a fun trip.”

(…That motherfucker.)

Kamijou thought of retrieving the luggage from the cloakroom and then leaving, but he couldn’t hire a Japanese taxi with British pounds. Exchanging the pounds for Japanese yen would have worked except that the banks wouldn’t be open at night.

(Wait, if I’m going outside Academy City, doesn’t that mean I have to have a nanodevice with a transmitter in it injected inside me and my legal guardian with me? I get the feeling I’ve been doing things in various unofficial ways a lot

lately…)

Still wondering what was going on, Kamijou grabbed Index's shoulders and shook her as she lay asleep next to him on the bench.

"Hey, Index. Wake up."

"M-mhohhh… I feel like I could just sleep for 3 days straight."

"That unusual drowsiness should be making you worried. Hey, you too, cat."

The small cat's front legs were twitching along with its dream and Kamijou succeeded in waking it up by poking its nose. Index was being as lazy as ever and Kamijou forcibly dragged her along as he headed for the 3rd reception desk as instructed.

"Kamijou Touma-sama, you said? Yes, we have your luggage in #3293. Is this it?" asked the young woman at the reception desk, but he had no idea if that was all of it or not. He simply nodded, took the large suitcase and opened it in order to check the contents.

Inside was foreign-looking money, passports, flight tickets, a pile of papers that looked like written orders, and a few days' worth of changes of clothes that looked like they had been bought at an extremely cheap chain store.

Kamijou took out the flight tickets, read the details written on them, and cried out in surprise.

"…Really!? These really have the name of a London airport on them."

"Why do we have to go to England now?"

"Um…this all looks pretty complicated."

Kamijou looked down at the written orders, but he was still a little shaky from the knockout gas. Normally, he might have been able to focus a little more and read it, but the text wasn't entering his head as he read it so he didn't understand very much of it.

"…Hmm. Something about some major magic trouble in Britain and having to

formally call you in, Index."

Kamijou's lips continued to move and he mumbled while reading it.

"And so your current guardian, Kamijou Touma, has to…Ah, so I have to go with you."

"I don't like how they think you're my guardian, Touma."

"You have no right to say that after I've been making you meals every day. Sigh…I guess we have to go. What a pain in the ass."

Since this magic trouble was major enough to have to call in Index, he really didn't want to go, but, if he just went back to the dorm, he had a feeling someone like the flame magician Stiyl Magnus would attack him for real. Whatever the problem was, it seemed it was so big it couldn't be ignored.

(Wait, isn't England where they had that huge tunnel explosion recently? …I have a really bad feeling about this.)

Complaining about it wasn't going to change anything, so they had to go through the boarding procedure.

Putting the pet cat in a tagged cage and passing through the metal detector gate (just like when they went to Chioggia, Index's safety-pin covered nun's habit caused problems here), ate up a lot of time.

"So we're going to England," said Index who was now wearing a plain dress that had been one of the cheap changes of clothes in the suitcase.

Kamijou looked over at her blankly.

"Oh, right. Since you were called in by the headquarters of the Anglican Church, you're going back to your city of birth."

"Yeah, but it doesn't really feel like it because I don't have any memories from before about a year ago."

Index didn't have any trouble saying that and she didn't have any special emotional attachment there. She even left the written orders on what they were

to do in England to Kamijou.

(…So she has no memories.)

Then Index asked Kamijou a question without realizing what he was thinking about.

“Touma, where’s the plane we’re going to get on?”

“Hmm? Tsuchimikado said he had it specially arranged for us.”

One wall of the arrival and departure lobby was made of glass and the night view of the runway could be seen through it. There were several large passenger planes. The work vehicles were driving along between them.

“Umm, this says it’s Flight 0001 at Gate 4…”

Kamijou looked in that direction and then froze.

A passenger plane stood at the other end of his gaze.

Its top speed was over 7000 kph.

It was that monstrous type of passenger plane that could make its way from Japan to Western Europe in about 2 hours.

Kamijou and Index both recalled the nightmarish emergency trip back from Chioggia with the odd suffering from having ones organs crushed from the horrible pressure of the G’s and Index ordering an inflight meal and having it all fly back behind her.

“…”

“…”

As they were recalling all this, the supersonic passenger plane was continuing its takeoff preparations. The container being carried to it with a forklift must have held the cat. They then both spoke.

“Hey, Index.”

“What, Touma?”

“…Let’s abandon that flight and get on the next plane even if we have to wait for a cancellation. We’ll get on a normal plane that doesn’t damage the human body.”

“As long as the plane doesn’t make your food fly backwards, I’m fine with it.”

Kamijou and Index exchanged a firm handshake and silently watched the supersonic passenger plane leave.

It almost felt like they could hear the cat yelling back calling them heartless.

Between the lines 1

It seems France has finally started moving.

Even if the Roman Catholic Church is pestering them from behind, that was a rather obedient response. Blowing up the sole land route connecting England and France is going to do quite a bit of damage to France’s economy. And yet they still blew up all three undersea tunnels.

Even so, they’re better off than England.

True enough. True enough.

For an island country like England, having its sole land route destroyed is like having half its life line severed. They’re currently increasing the travel over the sea and air routes to prevent a shortage of materials, but the costs that brings will bring their debt over the limit before long.

It’s because taking the same amount of luggage by plane costs significantly more

than by train.

Some optimistic critics are saying they can solve this by using sea transportation, but that's impossible. When the Eurotunnel opened, a number of ports were destroyed in order to give precedence for using the undersea tunnel. If they tried to go back to only using sea transportation, they would find themselves oversaturated with luggage to transport. Things would end up as congested as the area around the cash register at a department store during a good sale and the pure amount of luggage would make it all fall apart.

It'll probably take at least 3 months to repair the undersea tunnel. Until that's done, the store shelves just aren't going to be the same. Also, there are many different complicated ideas about how the repair work should be done, so it would be surprising if that didn't get stalled somewhere or other.

Hm? Yes, yes. That's exactly right.

France is backed by the European countries under Rome and Russia's control. In response, it seems England has asked Academy City and America for help.

Ah.

You mean the war between the Euro and the Dollar.

America took the brunt of the economic blow caused by the C-Document incident in Avignon. Because of that, investors have already moved their attention elsewhere. Because they realize what a crisis they're in, they're extremely afraid of the Euro and Yuan markets becoming active. Enough that they're even willing to sabotage their enemies.

That's the idiotic result caused by that incompetent Terra of the Left.

You know the details, right?

You did finish him off yourself, after all.

This incident was directly caused by the hundreds of years of antagonism between England and France. However, now that an Americentric economy has come into conflict with a Eurocentric economy, that antagonism has gone into a cold war between England and France.

Europe is certainly in a rough state, isn't it?

This isn't a simple war between two countries that's starting here.

It won't end there.

It seems there's something that bastard Fiamma wants badly enough to turn Europe into a sea of flames. And what really pisses me off is that it's that very same Fiamma that has almost complete control over the forces of Rome and Russia. Even if you or I gave an order, no one would obey it. We have no authority left.

Are you still going to go?

It's true that you are fairly powerful. In a straight fight, you'd be stronger than me.

But will your power be enough to deal with a calamity that can destroy entire countries if not the entire world? You will have no enemies, no allies, and no direction. You will be attacked evenly from all sides like in a disaster film. Will your power be enough to deal with a situation like that?

Well, if you say you're going to go, then fine.

I have no right to stop you and I have no reason to care if you die.

I just want to tell you my own plans. I won't be going. Ah? Don't mock me. This isn't because I'm afraid. I can't use my Divine Punishment spell anymore. And you may be a bit different, but God's Right Seat can't use normal magic and spiritual items. I'll just be going from place to place making the proper preparations.

My plan is going to shock Fiamma a lot more than just going straight there.

You can't order me around.

You go on your path and I'll go on mine.

Hm?

What happened to my never saying never?

Who cares?

I just said that back then because I felt like it. Do I really look like someone who would restrict myself like that?

Chapter 2: A Steel Battlefield Floating above the Clouds. *Sky_Bus_365.*

Part 1

The Amakusa girl Itsuwa puffed out her cheeks with a look of displeasure in her eyes.

When she had heard that Kamijou Touma was flying in on an Academy City supersonic passenger plane, she had noisily rushed around getting ready and then headed to the London airport to be his guide because she knew Japanese, but, when the plane arrived, Kamijou Touma wasn't there. There must have been some odd mix-up because she ended up with a cage containing a calico cat that was registered as a pet.

She had been thinking this was her chance and had even decided she would buy the Great Spirit Revealing Maid Set, so her disappointment at being sidestepped was quite something. She had returned to London's Japantown along with the cat cage and now she (a minor) was at the tea table gulping down the contents of a bottle. She even had dried squid prepared on a small dish.

That boy was supposed to have come to London as Index Librorum Prohibitorum's manager.

Some of Itsuwa's colleagues such as the short Kouyagi and the female Tsushima looked at Itsuwa and paled. The short Ushibuka received the greatest shock because he had been the one that had secretly hidden the potato shochu in the storage space below the kitchen floor.

"U-um, Itsuwa-san…? I-it just seems there was a little bit of a mix-up, so you

don’t need to get so down about it…” said the married Nomozaki with a wide forced smile on his face while he held Ushibuka’s arms behind his back.

Ushibuka was struggling and yelling, “She! She stole! She stole my Potato Baron!!”

In response, Itsuwa poured the liquid into a plain transparent cup and turned her gaze towards them with a blank look in her eyes and her head tilted to the side.

“Hic…I’m not…fheeling down… Dammit, thash’s right, thash’s right. Why am I…?”

She continued mumbling incoherently while barely moving her lips. She sounded like she was angry.

“…Really…what the hell ish a potato baron…? Thish alcohol has such annoying names… You can’t tell if it’sh a potato or a sweet potato or what…”

“Then don’t drink it! Don’t steal my enjoyment!!” yelled Ushibuka with tears in his eyes.

That was when the old Isahaya came into the room with an excited look on his face and gave an announcement.

“H-hey!! It seems that boy didn’t change his plans after all and is headed to London!!”

Itsuwa hurriedly stood up. When she did, the bottle was knocked over and the high class liquid spilled out onto the tea table.

“Hgyaaaaahhhh! My Potato Baron!!” shrieked Ushibuka and the female Tsushima chopped his neck with the side of her hand to quiet him, but Itsuwa wasn’t paying them any heed.

That boy was coming to London?

At the airport, she had been told he wasn’t on the plane, but had it really been a mix-up and had actually been onboard? If so…was it possible he would pay them a visit!?

A soft light started sparkling from all over Itsuwa's body, but her joyous expression suddenly stiffened.

She had realized just what a terrible sight she was.

Was she going to be seen in such a disgraceful way? Would she be seen drunk on potato shochu, every breath filled with the stench of alcohol, and dried squid legs stuck in the edge of her mouth?

"I-it would all be over!! If that happened, it would all be over!!"

She decided to at least do something about how she looked, so she ate all of the squid legs, popped a breath mint in her mouth, washed her face, and stretched her back. But all those things were exactly the types of things a drunk did, so her red face made her look like an old man at the horse races.

(N-no, just because he's coming to London doesn't mean he'll be coming directly to Japantown. Normally, he would stop by his hotel and then head to Buckingham Palace, so he won't be coming here right away! I need to focus on getting myself looking decent…!!)

Just when Itsuwa started thinking more optimistically, the old Isahaya shook his head with a gentle look on his face.

"No, Itsuwa. That boy is already on his way here."

Itsuwa's shoulders gave a large jump.

She thought while she wobbled on her feet.

(But why!? I can't imagine that he would come here by chance…!!)

But she did have an idea of why that boy would come by right away.

(Oh, that's right. I took his kitty at the airport…crap!! It wouldn't be surprising for him to stop by to pick up his pet cat!!)

Itsuwa was completely flustered and the sound of approaching footsteps reached her ears. Before she could do anything, she heard the sound of the door opening.

The sound of Isahaya yelling “He’s here!!” rang in Itsuwa’s ears.

The room was constructed as a Western-style room, but a Japanese sliding door was set up between the Western door and the rest of the room. A spiky haired silhouette could clearly be seen through the thin paper of the sliding door.

It seemed clear that he had come directly there.

(Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh- wh-wh-wh-wh-wh- wh-what-what-what do I do!?)

She was completely cornered.

Itsuwa's face was completely pale as the door slid to the side in front of her eyes. Itsuwa was sure that she was so drunk that the stench of alcohol was coming from every breath she took and even from every single one of her pores. Even the cat started to run away from her as if it were saying, "Young lady, that smell is simply unacceptable." Having reconfirmed what state she was in, Itsuwa's head was assaulted by absolute chaos.

(Waaaahhhh!!)

And then…

"Tah dah!! Spiky-haired Tatemiya Saiji is here-bghaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!?"

Immediately after her male colleague with black spiky hair revealed that he had been toying with her maiden heart, she didn't just overturn the tea table; she grabbed the tea table with one hand and mercilessly knocked Tatemiya away with it. The large man's body was knocked outside of the room and Isahaya, who had been Tatemiya's accomplice for the prank, paled.

Part 2

Sky Bus 365 was the spacious passenger plane Kamijou and Index had boarded after abandoning the cat. The passenger seats were divided into two floors and, while there were a large number of passengers, the space for each seat was rather large. Economy seats usually brought to mind something constrained like the seats in a movie theater, but that was not so for the Sky Bus 365. Even the cheapest seats had room enough to stretch out one's legs and a massage function.

There only real problem was…

"…I really thought there would have been at least *one* flight to London we could use," Kamijou muttered.

The flights to London had been fully booked. Kamijou and Index were still headed to the UK, but this first flight was headed for Edinburgh, Scotland and they would get on a domestic flight to London from there. That plan was all thanks to the advice of the young woman at the service counter.

Incidentally, Scotland was in the north of the UK while London was in the south.

Kamijou and Index had been looking for a plane with 2 cancellations and the ticket of course cost money. In his attempt to keep them from using a taxi to flee the airport, Tsuchimikado had taken the contents of Kamijou's wallet, but, in a small bit of luck, he was able to pay for the tickets with his cell phone's wallet function.

(…But this wallet function is basically the same thing as a credit card. I hope I don't end up screaming when I see the bill…)

In contrast to Kamijou holding his head for a very working class reason, Index was extremely optimistic. She was engrossed in the irregular place known as an "airplane". She was wearing a plain dress instead of her safety pin-covered nun's habit because they wouldn't have let her on the plane with those dangerous objects all over her.

"T-Touma. This chair has a game in it!!"

"It has buttons on it, but it isn't a video game. In fact, even normal TVs have-… Wait! Get your hand away from there, Index! You've gotten into the pay-per-view channels!!"

"Beef or fish!! Beef or fish!!"

"Yes, I know you're looking forward to the in-flight meal, so sto-…Waah!! The new release movie channel is super expensive!!"

"What's this button? Wahyah!! A clear cup with a string on it came out!!"

“That’s the emergency oxygen mask!!”

Index’s actions must have sent out a very serious signal, because a blonde flight attendant with a nice body came running over. Index was still too focused on pushing all the buttons, so Kamijou was forced to bow in apology in her stead.

After having the basics of in-flight etiquette explained to her, Index looked over questioningly.

“So there are parts of the game that cost money and parts that don’t?”

“I already told you: there are no games you can play on that screen. Having all those different buttons is just a trap for the pay-per-view channels. Here, look how much fun the free channel i-..uuh!?”

“Touma. It just has a bunch of small numbers and is talking about something called stocks.”

“Dammit. They purposefully show something boring to get you to look towards the pay-per-view channels.”

Kamijou felt a bit dejected and he heard a middle-aged man on the TV talking about the world economy in a monotone voice. Apparently, the Eurotunnel bombing had thrown the market into chaos.

Index gently straightened up and spoke.

“By the way, Touma. When does the airplane food get here?”

“The in-flight meal? Hmm, well it’s past dinner time, so the next one will probably be after 9, I guess. It looks like the people around us have already eaten and we don’t get any late meals because of our cheap seats.”

“…!!!???”

“Nooo! I know this must be a shock for you, but don’t bite Kamijou-san’s head in response, Index!! That’s just how it works, so I can’t do anything about it!!”

However, Kamijou was hungry himself because they had been gassed and brought to the airport by Tsuchimikado before they could eat dinner. He looked

around to see if there was a shop within the airplane and he saw a sign for a free drink corner at the very front of the seating area.

Kamijou Touma spoke quietly.

“Index. I’m about to head out on a journey.”

“T-to the Onigiri Kingdom!?”

“No, I’m not headed for such a wonderful land of grains, but I should be able to get us some coffee.”

Kamijou stood up from his seat and headed for the free drink corner. Sky Bus 365 was an extremely large passenger plane and the seats were lined up divided into three pairs of two by the aisles. The seating area could seat over 500 people and was divided by walls between economy, business, and first classes. The seating area was also split into a first floor and a second floor which essentially doubled its capacity.

From what he could see, there were a lot of foreigners onboard. A lot of people were sleeping under blankets made from a gleaming material that was 3 mm thick and made by NASA. Most of those people were probably businessmen returning home after going to Academy City for their jobs.

Kamijou was in the farthest back section, the economy seats. The free drink corner was on a portion of the wall dividing economy from business.

(…Is that part of the terrorism countermeasures?)

Present day airplanes didn’t let anyone bring plastic bottles or even toothpaste tubes on board to prevent people from bringing in liquid explosives. In exchange, the airline had set up a free drink corner to pacify the customers who felt their freedom had been taken away.

The drink corner had the kind of equipment that you would see at a family restaurant. It was the thing you put a paper cup under, pushed the button, and the drink came spraying out. But this one didn’t have many options. It only had coffee, black tea, orange juice, and 4 of the world’s most famous carbonated beverages. The coffee was just labeled as “coffee”. If you were particular about where your coffee was made, its bitterness, or its acidity, then you were simply

out of luck. There wasn’t even an option for hot or iced.

(Well, anything’s better than nothing, but this is still pretty rough for having missed dinner…Oh?)

Kamijou’s eyes became fixed on one spot.

Right next to the paper cup tower was a bunch of what looked like square crackers. They were there so their slight saltiness could go with the tea, but one could fill his stomach if he ate a large number of them.

(Hehh…So airplanes these days even have these for free. Oh, they have butter, blueberries, and some other things to put on them. I had heard that business for overseas flights had been down due to the fuel expenses and so it had become a service war, but I never thought they’d even be going all out with things like this. I guess I’ll take some. I hadn’t really noticed how hungry I was before, but my stomach is at it its limits now that there’s food right in front of me!!)

Kamijou started to reach over towards the crackers, but then he froze.

“…”

There was a small box next to the plate of crackers.

And there was a sign on the plate. It had something cutely written on it that looked like it had been handwritten by a flight attendant.

It was a price.

Part 3

Kamijou had decided not to go for the crackers, so he and Index rode the large

Sky Bus 365 with empty stomachs until, 9 hours later, it landed at a French airport.

It seemed likely the plane was refueling because it wasn't a non-stop flight, but there was a different reason.

After a light electronic tone, a female voice made an announcement. The same announcement was made in English, Chinese, and various other languages until Japanese words reached Kamijou's ears.

"Due to the effects of the accidental Eurotunnel explosion this flight will be aiding in the transport of goods from France to Britain. We are sorry for the delay, but please wait until the luggage has been loaded."

After hearing the announcement, Kamijou operated the small TV built into the seat and spoke.

"Oh, that's right. They were saying on the news that they're taking everything by boat and plane because that huge tunnel can't be used."

"Touma, when will we leave?"

"In tough times, we have to help each other out."

The view outside the window was filled with darkness. Kamijou's internal clock was yelling, "I got on a plane just after sunset, and, 9 hours later, it's just after sunset? It doesn't add up!!" But that was the magic of jet-lag on a global scale.

He couldn't see it from his window, but a portion of the passenger plane's body must have been opened up as it had a number of forklifts load containers onboard.

"Touma. Is it time for the beef and the fish, yet?"

"You have to choose one or the other. When did you get the idea that you were going to eat both? Don't tell me you're planning on eating mine, too!"

"Nn!! That old man out there in work clothes is eating a sandwich!!"

"The airport workers must have it tough if they have to work while eating…

Wait, Index! Why are you starting to act like a beast!? No matter how much you struggle, that sandwich isn't going to warp in here! Ow!! …Hm?"

As Kamijou struggled, his elbow hit something.

He looked over and saw something that hadn't been there before. A square portion of the inner wall by the window was cut as a separate piece and it was sitting open like a car's dashboard. Inside were more than 20 dangerous looking types of cables.

(Uh, oh. Did I end up opening something I shouldn't have?)

"…"

Kamijou thought for a second and then used his entire body to slam it shut.

The blonde flight attendant with a nice body must have heard their conversation, because she came walking down the aisle and spoke to them in polite Japanese.

"I am very sorry. We try our best to match the expectations of the passengers."

"D-d-don't worry. We're not going to demand a refund or anything," denied Kamijou waving his hands around frantically.

He changed the subject in an attempt to keep her from noticing.

"You know, is it really worth it to transport daily necessities by plane?"

"Well," the flight attendant seemed as if she were having trouble saying something. "Of course, the items we are bringing in from other countries are mostly things that cannot be acquired within the UK. With the undersea railroad tunnel closed, the sea and air routes have to make up for it."

"Things you can't get in the UK, huh?"

"Even though Great Britain is an island country, most of its seafood is shipped in. And things like that go bad if they are slowly brought over on a ship, so a plane has to be used. Also, I believe the containers on this flight have…liquid foods like oatmeal in them."

“Liquid foods?”

“Yes. I do not know the name of the disease, but there are people who cannot eat normal food, so they need highly regulated food. Apparently, this food is only made in a facility in France that belongs to a certain food company.”

“That sounds tough,” said Kamijou as he looked back out the window.

The containers being loaded on the plane were, of course, all necessary. The time spent loading them on would surely help some people in the UK.

“…Food…” whispered Index. “…Food…Airplane food…In-flight meal… Beef…Beef or fish!!”

“Gwoh!! Index, I’m well aware your hunger is at its max because you didn’t get any dinner, so please calm down!! It’ll be time for the meal before long!!”

“How much longer is ‘before long’!?”

“…About an hour?”

“!!!???”

“Y-you idiot!! Kamijou-san’s head tastes of neither beef nor fish…Gah!!”

Index was taken over by her carnivore side and she attacked Kamijou. Kamijou felt sorry for the flight attendant when she ran off saying she would be right back.

He let out a scream as he was attacked.

“Hey, Index!! You’re bothering all the other people in here!! And what kind of person demands to have their in-flight meal before everyone else!?”

“But my empty stomach has already gone past the limit three times over!! You need to understand that I’m at the point where I can’t wait another second!!”

Before she had run off, the flight attendant had given Index a toy whistle (it was shaped like a ball and was probably a gift given for points gathered by buying tickets). Index distracted herself by squeezing it and making it whistle.

Kamijou and Index argued about various things, but, no matter how long they waited, the blonde-haired flight attendant with a nice body didn’t come back.

A quizzical look came to Kamijou’s face and he heard another announcement.

“…Sorry for the wait. The loading is complete. We are now preparing to take off. All passengers are to take their seats and fasten their seatbelts.”

“Hm? Oh, the plane tilts diagonally when it takes off, so it would be dangerous to stand in the aisle. I’m sure they fasten down the cart that carries the in-flight meals, so they can’t give us any food until we’re in the air.”

“…”

“Well, the plane will be stable in about 20 minutes, so just wait until then, okay? Wait, Index-san, why are you looking down?”

No response came.

He just heard a beast-like growl.

Kamijou felt incoming danger and thought with all his might.

(Please bring the in-flight meal as soon as possible!!)

But as a Level 0, he couldn’t use telepathy.

He heard Index’s teeth snapping together repeatedly.

Part 4

Sky Bus 365 took off safely.

The airplane leveled off and the seatbelt light turned off.

The large passenger plane began its pleasant in-air services again.

There was a man who was watching Kamijou and Index from a slight distance.

Actually, it would be more accurate to say he was staring at them dumbfounded.

The man was standing in the aisle.

He was not an economy class passenger like Kamijou or Index. To keep any unnecessary suspicion off of him, he had bought a business class ticket. He had gone to the bathrooms in the “wall” area separating business class and economy class and then continued on to the economy class as if he were returning to a seat there.

(What’s going on?)

The man questioningly pulled out a notepad.

He had been told not to look at the notepad if he didn’t have to. He was only supposed to recheck the notepad for something very important. The man felt the situation qualified and he quickly flipped through the pages covered in scattered words and numbers.

A seat number was written on one of the pages.

He checked it and confirmed that he had been right.

The seat the spiky-haired Asian was sitting in was supposed to be empty.

The man’s comrade had bought the ticket for that seat with a false name.

“…”

The man pointed at the written seat number and could only come up with one answer.

(Shit. The seat was filled by someone waiting for a cancellation…!?)

Even if a seat was booked, it would be considered cancelled if the passenger

didn’t arrive by the boarding deadline. At that point, another customer could purchase the ticket. That must have been how that spiky-haired Asian had arrived in the seat that was supposed to be empty.

The man understood the situation.

However, he couldn’t think of a way to fix it.

(What do I do…?)

He would look suspicious if he continued to stand in the middle of the aisle, so he slowly started to walk and headed for the stairway further along. Sky Bus 365 had two stories. If he used the stairs to the other floor and then doubled back on that floor’s aisle, there was less danger of someone getting suspicious because they kept seeing him go by.

He put the notepad back in his pocket, walked down the aisle, and walked past the spiky-haired Asian. As he did, his head rotated, keeping an eye on the Asian.

(What do I do? I can’t carry out the plan without using that seat.)

Part 5

The in-flight meal didn’t seem to be coming.

Even when the passenger plane had left the runway, flown into the sky, and leveled off, the flight attendant did not come back.

(Actually, is it even possible to get your in-flight meal early? Her colleagues and superiors aren’t going to be mad at her for doing this for us, are they?)

“Nnn, I’m kind of worried. I think I’m going to go check on the flight

attendant.”

“I’m worried about the beef or fish, too!!”

“Things would get too complicated if you came, so stay here.”

If the blonde flight attendant with a nice body was being scolded, he was planning on telling her not to worry about getting them the food early. If Index came in clearly starving and yelling her slogan of “Beef or fish!! Beef or fish!!”, it would just make the situation a whole lot worse.

Kamijou got up from the window seat, stepped over Index’s legs, and finally made his way out into the aisle. He was heading for the “wall” area dividing the economy class from the business class. The area had a number of facilities including the bathrooms, the free drink corner, the in-flight meal area, and a stairway to the other floor.

(Hmm. What am I going to do if she really is being scolded…?)

He nervously headed down the aisle and entered the “wall” area. As usual, the lighting was much dimmer than in the passenger area.

He looked around, but didn’t see the flight attendant anywhere.

(Huh? She isn’t here?)

He had predicted that she was preparing the in-flight meal, so he had been sure she would be there, but it seemed he had been wrong.

He spotted a door to a small room that seemed to be the area for preparing the meals, but he wasn’t sure if he should really be opening the door, so he stopped.

He put his ear to the door, but he didn’t hear any sounds of someone working within.

(I probably shouldn’t go around anymore searching for her… I don’t really have a problem, so I guess I shouldn’t be chasing after the flight attendant.)

Kamijou decided to return to Index and turned around.

“Kyaah!?”

He heard a high-pitched scream and felt something run into him. It seemed someone had been passing by next to him and he had knocked them to the ground.

Looking down, he saw the blonde flight attendant with a nice body.

She had been holding papers in both hands, but they had scattered everywhere when she had run into Kamijou. The A4 size papers had small lines of text on them that looked like they had been written in a word processor, but they were in a foreign language, so Kamijou didn’t have a clue what they said.

And it wasn’t really the time to be reading anyway.

“Wah! I’m sorry, are you oka-…”

Just before Kamijou could lower his head in apology, the flight attendant moved quickly. She gathered the scattered papers at tremendous speed while still collapsed on the ground.

She then spoke.

“D-did you see…?”

Kamijou Touma gave an honest response.

“No, I didn’t see up your skirt!!”

“?”

The woman with a nice body and a tight skirt stared at him blankly.

It seemed that wasn’t what she had been worried about.

(??? Then what did she think I saw…?)

Kamijou finally looked down at the papers she was holding.

But before he could look at the text, she hurriedly stood up.

“I-I’m very sorry. I will have the in-flight meal to you right away!!”

“Oh. Um…” Kamijou started to speak, but, before he could, the flight attendant apologized once more, bowed, and headed off somewhere.

(…What was that about…?)

Kamijou stared after her in puzzlement.

He didn’t have a perfect memory like Index, so he couldn’t recall the contents of papers he had merely glanced at.

The only bit of the lines of letters from the alphabet he could remember was…

(What were those? Were they flight numbers?)

Part 6

Starting from the front, Sky Bus 365 was divided into first, business, and economy classes.

But there was, of course, another section farther forward than all of those.

That was the cockpit.

The front, the sides, and even the ceiling of the small area were covered with buttons and switches and there were 4 chairs on the floor. The front two were for those piloting the plane and the back two were for those on standby. At the time, the pilot and two copilots were in the cockpit leaving one chair open.

“The report from control has finished printing,” announced the blonde flight attendant.

She was speaking Japanese.

Normally, she was not someone who would enter the cockpit. It wasn't just a moral issue; it was part of the airline's regulations. The reason for the flight attendant being in the cockpit was simple.

They were in an emergency situation.

"So that's the emailed threat the airline received," said a large man wearing a mostly white military uniform.

He was the pilot of the passenger plane.

His black hair was cut short and he had swarthy skin.

As the language he was speaking suggested, he was Japanese.

He was not speaking to the flight attendant.

He was speaking into his headset to the control center at the Academy City international airport.

"It's pretty bad, isn't it?" said the airport security officer.

The pilot gave a slight groan in response.

"Yes, it is. No one would go along with that."

"But that brings the danger that your plane will be attacked," continued the security officer in a bitter voice.

"So the enemy is a French anti-England group…"

"Historically, France and England have been enemies at times and allies at times, but that group seems to be focusing only on the negative feelings." It wasn't clear how the Academy City airport security officer was getting his information, but he tended to be right. "It also seems they think the Eurotunnel bombing was purposefully done by England and that only France was damaged by it. As such, they want to do the same type of damage to England."

"And so they're going to completely take out England's air routes, huh? What a

ridiculous demand," said the pilot in a low voice.

The Eurotunnel was no more than "an important land route" to France, but it was "the sole land route to other countries" for the UK. The pilot saw no reason England would have bombed the tunnel.

"The person who sent the email threat has been taken in by French authorities, but it seems someone else is going to carry out the attack. And the guy is refusing to speak in the questioning room, so it looks as if it will be difficult to get information through normal means."

"It could be a problem if that takes too long. It only takes between 40 minutes to an hour to get from Paris to Edinburgh," the pilot spoke calmly as he gripped the yoke.

"If the terrorists are serious, it's highly likely they will make their move in that time."

"But will they really?" responded the pilot. "They'd be bringing down the plane one of their comrades is on."

"Their primary goal is just as it was explained in the email. It's best to assume their man onboard prepared to commit suicide if their demands aren't met."

"…"

"Whether their demands are met or Sky Bus 365 is brought down, the damage they're after will be done. To them, either result is a success."

"…This is horrible. I want to just turn around and head back to the Paris airport."

"If you take a sharp turn like that, there is a risk the terrorist will notice and make his move. That said, you don't have the spare fuel needed to take a turn gradual enough he wouldn't notice. …It's thanks to the extra cargo you took on and the high price of oil. But I'm sure you're well aware of your situation."

"So we have to find the terrorists ourselves before he makes his move. God damn it," muttered the pilot.

Sky Bus 365's passenger area was split into 2 floors. Very few passenger planes in the world were as big. It held more than 500 passengers. Checking each and every one would take longer than the hour they had. And detecting a criminal just from viewing people at a distance instead of questioning them was difficult even for police.

"…We're all amateurs here."

"You still have to do it. An Academy City teleportation-type esper may be able to, but no one from a police organization can enter that plane now."

The way the man from Academy City had brought up a teleporter as a concrete and usable method, brought nothing but bitterness to the pilot.

"Also…Well, I'm sure you know, but do your best not to let the passengers find out about this problem. A plane with nowhere to escape to becomes a living hell when chaos breaks out."

"I know that. I'm the one whose shoulders the lives of the passengers rest on. I'm not twisted enough to use the passengers as a shield."

When the pilot said that, a different channel cut into his headset.

It was a channel from within the plane.

"Emergency! Someone, most likely the terrorist, has made their move!!"

"!?"

The crewman's words caused the pilot's body to stiffen.

The report continued.

"One injured but conscious. The attack suddenly came from behind so the attacker wasn't seen. What do we do, sir!?"

Part 7

Index's hunger was at its max.

"In-flight meeeal! Iiiin-fliiiight meeeeaaaallll! Beeeef oooorrrr fiiiiissshhhh…!"

"…I feel a great pressure coming from the side. It's like there's a lion properly sitting in the seat next to me. What is Kamijou-san supposed to do?"

"Not only is the beef or fish not coming, but the bourgeois person next to us is munching on the crackers they make you pay for. My stomach is boiling."

"Yeah, but Tsuchimikado stole everything in my wallet, so I can't really do anything about it. All I have are British poun-…"

Kamijou had been scratching his head as he spoke, but he suddenly froze.

Index stared at him questioningly.

"…Wait a second. This plane is going from Academy City to the UK, so you might be able to pay with British money."

"…!!!???"

"No!! You're right to be angry, Index-san, but if you crush my skull with your jaws, you'll never get those crackers!!"

At the last second, Kamijou managed to control the beast's maw spread wide before his eyes.

Having barely managed to keep his life, he got up from his seat and headed for the free drink corner.

(…I've been wandering back and forth quite a bit, haven't I? I hope no one thinks I'm acting suspiciously.)

Kamijou was worrying needlessly because, as he walked down the aisle, he saw

a lot of people walking down the aisle to stretch their legs after sitting for so long. The chairs had massage functionality, but this was economy class. The massage wouldn't relax one's entire body.

The free drink corner was located in the "wall" area dividing economy class and business class. Paper money from a number of countries had been put inside the transparent box next to the crackers. A small blackboard had the rates written for different currencies. It seemed British currency was acceptable.

(Let's see…I can get ten crackers for 3 pounds. Wait, how many yen is 3 pounds?)

Kamijou couldn't get a sense of the value of things based on foreign currency, so he just paid it without knowing if it was cheap or expensive.

After putting the money in the box, he grabbed a clear package of ten crackers.

"…Huh?"

He was about to turn and head back to Index when he suddenly stopped.

As well as the free drink corner, the "wall" area had bathrooms, a storage area for cleaning supplies, and a small room used to store and heat up the in-flight meals.

One of the doors was ajar.

It was the door to the food area that had been closed when Kamijou had been there before.

(…Is it really all right for an airplane door to be left open like that?)

The plane tilted greatly when taking off and landing and there was also occasional shaking from turbulence. If a door was left partially open, it could suddenly open or close which could smash someone's fingers or break the hinges. Kamijou only knew this from a documentary he had seen.

"I guess I should close it…right?" he casually muttered as he approached the door.

He decided that no one would get mad at him for just closing a door, but his eyebrows moved slightly just before he grabbed the doorknob.

He had seen what was on the other side of the door.

The room itself was small. It was just a space to heat up the in-flight meals, so it had a number of microwave ovens bolted to metal shelves.

That part wasn't the problem.

Something dark red was splattered on one of the microwave ovens fixed on the wall. The stain was about 15 cm across and 50 cm long. After thinking for a second, Kamijou decided that someone with dirty hands must have put their hand to the wall in order to stand up.

He wondered what the dark red substance was.

That area was for heating up the in-flight meals, so he thought it might have been some kind of sauce or stew.

"You saw it, didn't you?" said a sudden voice from directly behind him.

It was a female voice.

Kamijou spun around and found the blonde flight attendant with a nice body standing there.

She continued speaking with an apologetic look on her face.

"You saw the blood, didn't you?"

She had given him information he hadn't previously heard.

"So that's-," he started to say, but he couldn't get the words out of his mouth.

He heard a loud impact.

It took him over a second to realize that it was the sound of his arm being twisted and his body being thrown to the floor.

The flight attendant was more or less straddling his face-down body. She brought

her face to his ear and apologized quietly so only he could hear.

“(…I’m sorry. All crewmembers are trained in hand-to-hand combat so we can deal with any trouble that breaks out onboard without weapons. Although, we really only practice what’s in the manual.)”

“Wh-what’s going on…?”

The flight attendant didn’t say any more to Kamijou and instead used the hand not holding his arm to hit a switch on what looked like a radio.

“Sir, we have a situation,” she said in Japanese.

She spoke in a completely cold-headed and businesslike way.

“Before I could wipe away the blood, one of the passengers spotted it. I have determined that he has learned of the incident occurring on the plane. What should I do with him?”

Part 8

It seemed the blonde flight attendant with a nice body was waiting for someone while she held Kamijou down.

The blank time stretched on.

The flight attendant spoke.

“This is a terrorist attack…”

“You’re a terrorist!?”

“N-no!!” she hurriedly denied. “The airport control has passed on information that there is one onboard. If we don’t give in to their demand, the terrorist will use a structural defect in this Sky Bus 365 to cause its landing to fail…In other words, to make it crash.”

“…Seriously?”

“The blood you saw belonged to another crew member. She was suddenly attacked from behind. Most likely by the terrorist.”

“You don’t think *I’m* the terrorist, do you?”

Kamijou had a very bad feeling about the situation, but it seemed the flight attendant shook her head. However, he couldn’t actually see her head because he was lying face down and she was straddling him.

“I hadn’t thought of that… But I can’t let this information get out to the other passengers. This may be a dangerous situation, but that information would cause a panic if it got out. People could get hurt and it could even provoke the terrorist into attacking.”

She seemed at a loss as to what to do.

Most likely, she had only told him all that because she felt she had owed him for what she had done to him.

She may have completely sealed his movements with her self-defense techniques, but she still felt inferior.

“What are you going to do?”

“Well…”

Before she could continue, help arrived.

Help for her, not for Kamijou.

A large man wearing what looked like a white military uniform arrived. He was most likely the pilot.

The man looked down to where Kamijou was lying and spoke in Japanese.

“…We have to keep him separated from the other passengers.”

“B-but can we really do that? It’s true that we have a duty to ensure the safety of the passengers, but we don’t have the right to confine them.”

The one who was actually holding Kamijou down was the one hesitating.

The pilot, on the other hand, did not waver.

Slight distress flashed on his face, but it didn’t look to be enough alter his opinion.

“Do you really think telling him not to say anything and then sending him back to his seat would be enough? He would surely panic and that would lead to a major panic amid the passengers. …I thought you understood this. You did follow your instructions to keep him restrained.”

“…”

“We have no choice but to keep him back here until the situation is resolved. As thanks for his cooperation, we will refund him the cost of the flight. If he still makes a fuss, we’ll just leave it to the airline’s legal department.”

“W-wait a second!!” Kamijou cut in. He was face down on the floor with one arm held behind his back, but he still spoke loudly. “I heard there might be a terrorist onboard. If that’s true, should you really be focusing on this!? Are you sure you can find the guy on your own? You need any extra bit of help you can get, right? So, let me-…!!”

Kamijou’s words were cut off by the pilot clicking his tongue.

He glanced up at the flight attendant and then back down to Kamijou’s face.

“…We’re keeping you confined here so you won’t do something like that.”

“What?”

“Listen. There are over 500 passengers on this aircraft. The terrorist hiding

among them has all of those lives in his grasp. In a situation like this, we can't have an amateur like you going around as he please causing trouble."

Kamijou got pissed at what he took as the pilot picking a fight with him, but the pilot continued with some cold words.

"Can you be entrusted with those 500 lives?"

"…!?"

"As the captain of this aircraft, that is my duty. As such, I will take the actions I determine will best protect the lives of everyone onboard even if it gets me fired in the end. Do not say you will help unless you are prepared to take on everything that entails. You cannot take on that responsibility, nor do you have to."

The pilot gestured to the flight attendant telling her to get off of Kamijou.

He wasn't having Kamijou released.

He was having him confined elsewhere.

"The in-flight meal heating area here is open, so throw him in there. If this becomes a major incident, all responsibility will lie with me."

Part 9

The door closed and Kamijou heard the sound of the lock clicking.

The room had nothing but the microwave ovens and the blood stain in it, so he sat down on one of the metal shelves.

When the pilot had left and the flight attendant was about to throw him into the small room, she had bowed slightly looking apologetic.

“I-I’m very sorry. We have to do this to prevent chaos from breaking out onboard.”

She must have felt that he deserved an explanation of the situation that had led to him being left there.

Kamijou thought back on what the flight attendant had told him.

Apparently, the information that a terrorist was onboard was fairly accurate. The emailed threat the airline had received was as follows:

There is a structural defect in the Sky Bus 365 model of passenger aircraft. We have carried out a few tests and proven it. If you do not destroy the master recorder for the four major British airlines, the defect in the Sky Bus 365 headed from Academy City to Edinburgh will be used to bring it down.

“The master recorder?”

“It’s a computer that provides centralized management for passengers’ flight tickets and luggage tags. Without it, the airlines would grind to a halt. It’s just too much information to deal with by hand.”

It seemed the method the terrorists wanted them to use to destroy the master recorders was to infect them with the computer virus attached to the email.

“Apparently, if a master recorder is infected while connected to the network, its data will be completely destroyed and a log file of the destruction will be posted as a comment on the airline’s blog. If the format of the log were analyzed, a dummy log could be made and the destruction of the master recorders could be faked. However, it seems the logs are encrypted, so the analysis would take a few days.”

She kept saying things like “apparently” and “it seems”, so Kamijou guessed that the flight attendant was inexperienced with that field.

“…What is this structural defect?”

“We don’t know. But the flights mentioned in the email were investigated. They were all Sky Bus 365 models like this one. There was Flight 5991 from Paris to Moscow, Flight 4135 from Neath to New York, and Flight 7558 from Marseille to Beijing. All of them had a 15 second interval where the engines cut out midflight. The parts involved were all disassembled and examined, but no cause was found, so they are still used today.”

Those three flights had been practice runs for the terrorists.

And this was the real deal.

Or at least, that was what the investigators had concluded.

“Then what about that blood? You said another crew member was attacked, right?”

“We don’t know exactly why the terrorist did that. In fact, it isn’t clear what the terrorist has to do to take advantage of this defect. But the attack may have been a necessary part of his plan.”

Kamijou had interpreted the look on her face right before she closed the door as one of weariness.

“…So the terrorists are trying to completely close off the air routes to the UK,” muttered Kamijou while alone in the small room.

The airlines could go along with the demand and destroy the master recorders or they could refuse and have the Sky Bus 365 crash. Either outcome would be a major blow to the British airline industry.

And this was all on top of the sole land route, the Eurotunnel, being destroyed.

(So were the terrorists also involved with that…?)

Kamijou thought for a bit and finally shook his head.

With so little information, an amateur like him wasn’t going to come up with the truth.

He turned his thoughts to having been thrown in the small room.

(That really isn’t how you should treat a customer. That said, taking on responsibility for 500 lives really is a bit much…)

Kamijou’s shoulders relaxed.

He turned his thoughts in a positive direction.

(I hope the next time that door opens it’s good news.)

Part 10

Starting from the front of the plane, the Sky Bus 365 was divided into first, business, and economy classes. It was further divided into 2 floors effectively creating 6 sections.

The stairs used to go between the first and second floors were located in the “wall” areas dividing the different classes. The “wall” areas were actually over 7 meters thick and had bathrooms, a free drink corner, and other small facilities located in them.

There was a certain hatch located in one of those “wall” areas.

It was a fire door connecting to the cargo hold.

The Sky Bus 365’s cargo hold was a large area a floor below the passenger seating. There was no real need to connect the passenger area and the cargo hold, but having a passage allowed the crew to put out a fire if one were to break out in the cargo hold. That was the purpose behind the emergency hatch.

“…”

A man was standing in front of the hatch.

A small electronic tone rejected the man’s action.

He had a card key in his hand.

He had gone out of his way to attack a flight attendant from behind in order to obtain that card key.

(…Damn.)

The man swiped the card key down through the card reader once more.

But, as he expected, he only got the same rejecting tone as before in response.

(Dammit. I can’t do anything if I can’t get this open…)

Something like a moan leaked from the man’s throat.

He held a black cell phone in his hand. He had the necessary program on it. He just had to attach a cable to the connector on the bottom of the phone and load the necessary program to the Sky Bus 365 in order to complete the preparations to take advantage of the structural defect.

The place he was originally supposed to do that from was an economy class seat. His comrade had reserved the seat under a false name, but a spiky-haired Asian had taken the seat after his comrade’s reservation had been cancelled.

He could always use his physical strength to dislodge the boy, but acting violently could make an enemy of around 100 passengers.

This was his only way now.

In order to carry out a backup plan he had in case things weren’t going according to the main plan, he had to get that hatch open.

(Fuck, fuck, fuck!! I guess a flight attendant just doesn’t have the authority to open the hatch. But everyone of pilot class who have higher authority levels are in the cockpit. If I was just going to charge in there, there was no need for all this roundabout shit with the structural defect.)

Not giving up, the man looked toward the exit from the “wall” area that led to

the economy class aisle. If only that spiky-haired Asian hadn't been there, he wouldn't have had to go through any conspicuous actions like attacking a flight attendant.

(Dammit. This has gotten really bad if it's come to using what's in the cargo hold! If only that seat had been empty, this could have gone so well…!!)

"…Huh?"

He wasn't there.

Maybe he was using the bathroom, because the spiky-haired boy who had been sitting in that seat was gone. Also, the silver-haired green-eyed girl who seemed to have been with the boy was out of her seat and wandering down the aisle.

(This is my chance.)

This was his last chance to take out the Sky Bus 365 without using what was in the cargo hold.

The man took gloves out of his pocket. If he were to head straight down the aisle, he would run into the silver-haired girl, so he decided it would be best to use the stairs, go down the aisle on the other floor, and approach the seat from behind the girl.

Part 11

Kamijou Touma wasn't coming back.

Index had been waiting for the boy to return with the crackers, but she had finally been unable to withstand the hunger and stood up from her seat to go find

him.

(Touma might be hogging all the delicious things to himself.)

However, Index's search had come to an end quickly. She had thought Kamijou had gone straight down the aisle and into the "wall" area. That wasn't very far away, but she couldn't find him.

"?"

Index looked quizzical and turned back the way she had come.

She then noticed something that made her pause.

Someone else was sitting in Kamijou Touma's seat.

It was a white man wearing a plain, colored suit. He looked to be in his early twenties and was reasonably tall. He had a newspaper covered in French text spread out in front of him, so Index couldn't see the lower half of his face making it difficult to get a grasp of what he looked like.

(Maybe he sat in the wrong seat.)

She had a perfect memory, so she knew she wasn't the one that was mistaken.

As such, she didn't hesitate to sit in her own seat and speak to the man next to her.

"That's Touma's seat."

The man with the newspaper's shoulders twitched at hearing her voice.

Looking closer, he was only holding the newspaper with one hand. When she looked at what his other hand was doing, she saw he was holding some kind of black cell phone. The newspaper also obstructed the view of his lap which had what Index thought might be parts of his phone. There was some kind of thin cable and something that looked like nail clippers.

"…Dammit. I can't even get 120 seconds?" he muttered in French.

Index stared at him in puzzlement and the man took action before she could say

anything.

He placed the open newspaper on his legs and casually held his hand out towards her.

He was holding something in that hand.

It was pointed and sharp and he pressed it against Index's side making sure the other passengers couldn't see.

"Airport security mainly gets by with metal detectors," the man said in French. "So it's surprisingly easy to get something like a knife made of whittled animal bone past them. And it's enough to pierce an organ or cut an artery."

The man was making his move in order to keep the witness from moving.

(…This is really bad. The very first step didn't go right and nothing's gone as planned since!!)

The man was a step away from being checkmated.

If the girl next to him let out a scream, it was all over. He could kill the girl, but that could just make enemies of all 100 passengers in that economy class section. He was more afraid of getting wrapped in the panic that would cause than of someone attacking him out of a sense of justice. It wasn't something he could deal with using only a tiny knife.

"…What are you doing?" asked the girl.

The man had no real reason to answer her, but he did so anyway. He was speaking more to himself than to her.

"Loading a program. It's a program that lets me interfere with the emergency landing stabilizer using the data transmission of this cell phone."

"Emergency landing?"

The man ignored the frowning girl and reached over to the area of the wall just

below the window next to his seat. He stretched out a round wire, slid it into a gap in the wall, and then moved it sideways. A straight line appeared on the wall almost as if he had cut it with a knife.

The man stuck his fingernail into that thin line and pulled it towards him. It opened up much like the top of a car's dashboard. More than 20 cables were inside.

"If they go along with our demand, I won't have to use this. In fact, I don't really want to have to…"

His voice trailed off.

The cable extending from the connector on the bottom of his phone was supposed to attach to the maintenance cable inside the wall, but it wasn't working. There were small cracks running through the connecter the two cables were supposed to use.

The sound of the two pieces of plastic scraping across each other was about to drive him crazy. He wrinkled his brow and occasionally clicked his tongue, but he met the same result no matter how many times he tried.

The cables wouldn't connect. He couldn't load the program.

"Oh, that's the thing Touma had open," said the girl next to him, but the man wasn't listening.

"Shit!!" he yelled in French and the nearby passengers glanced in his direction.

He slammed the cover to the open area on the wall closed and quietly stared at the ceiling while still holding the bone knife against the girl.

(What do I do?)

He couldn't load the program from the economy class seat. He could no longer "negotiate" using the structural defect.

He truly couldn't use that method.

(…This is the worst case scenario. I wouldn't be exaggerating to say that almost

half the purpose behind this plan is gone. The only way left is to rely on that… but I don’t want to use it!!)

The man got his feelings under control

He could no longer use the economy class seat, so he had to find a way to open the hatch to the cargo hold. He had to think of a way to get a card key of someone at a higher level than a flight attendant in the remaining time.

And he still had another problem.

There was the girl sitting stiffly next to him.

If he let her go now, she would let those around know about the terrorist attack. He had to silence her somehow.

He had no choice in the matter.

He gulped loudly, put the tools and the phone that were on his lap in his pocket, and instructed the girl while hiding the knife behind the French newspaper.

“Stand up. If you resist at all, I’ll stab you.”

The plan was falling apart.

Not even the man currently in charge of it was able to control the situation anymore.

Part 12

Kamijou’s head suddenly shot up while he was sitting in the in-flight meal heating space that had numerous microwave ovens lining the walls.

(…Footsteps?)

He had suddenly heard what sounded like them from the other side of the door.

And it wasn’t just one set of footsteps.

It was at least two.

Kamijou wondered who they were and then a further noise reached his ears.

It sounded like a whistle.

(…Is that Index’s?)

The blonde flight attendant with a nice body had given her a cheap ball-like toy because she was getting mad about the in-flight meal not arriving. It was probably a type of gift and it made a whistling sound when squeezed.

It didn’t sound like it was being voluntarily squeezed. The sound came at defined intervals as if it were in someone’s pocket and rubbing up against their body as they walked.

If the toy really was a prize given for collecting a certain number of airline points, Index wouldn’t necessarily be the only person with one, but Kamijou still thought of the girl wearing the plain dress.

If it really was Index, who was with her? It was possible she had been captured by the blonde flight attendant with a nice body.

But then another idea suddenly floated to the top of Kamijou’s mind.

The thought was like a splash of cold water to his optimistic view.

(Wait. Would the world really be that kind to us? This could be dangerous.)

He thought back to why he had been thrown into that room in the first place.

(No, that couldn’t be…)

Kamijou rejected the idea, but then the two sets of footsteps stopped.

The whistling noise stopped as well.

He could hear the sound of a door opening.

They were in the “wall” area. No other passengers would be around.

And…

“Get in if you don’t want me to stab you.”

The voice was speaking French, so Kamijou couldn’t understand it.

But the rough male voice clearly wasn’t the voice of crewmember from the service industry.

(Fuck that!!)

Kamijou was about to run towards the door yelling, but he would only provoke the criminal and probably wouldn’t break down the door.

The door wasn’t metal, but it didn’t look like a simple tackle would break it. The lock was electronic, so using something like a wire wouldn’t be any help either.

While he thought about all that, a movement was made on the other side of the door.

It seemed the man making the threat and the person he was threatening had entered a different nearby small room.

(Dammit!!)

Kamijou looked around the area and spotted an aluminum cart for the in-flight meals. It was something like a square baby carriage.

He roughly grabbed the cart’s handle and turned it towards the door.

He didn’t even have time to think about how much it would cost to pay for the repairs.

“Ooooohhhhhhhhhhhhh!!” he yelled as he ran forward.

The cart struck the door.

With a loud crash, the front of the aluminum cart was smashed in. However, the door did not escape unscathed. The lock popped off and the door opened as if it had been kicked open. Losing to the momentum, Kamijou and the broken cart continued out into the passageway.

He let go of the cart and looked around.

The “wall” area had a number of small rooms in it, but only one had its door closed.

He grabbed the doorknob and flung the door open.

It was a storage closet for cleaning supplies. A number of mops and a plastic bucket were contained in the small space.

Someone with a familiar face was inside.

It was Index.

She was collapsed face up on the ground and a man Kamijou had never seen before was straddling her. The man had a rubber hose that must have been in the storage closet in his hands and had it wrapped around Index’s thin neck.

(What is he doing?)

Faster than he could think, Kamijou’s hands moved.

“?”

The man strangling Index must have been engrossed in his task because he didn’t notice the danger until Kamijou had grabbed the back of his collar.

Kamijou grabbed the man’s suit and forcefully spun his own body around.

The centrifugal force threw the man out of the storage closet. With a crash, he struck the wall without even hitting the ground first.

The oxygen was forced from the man’s lungs and he slid to the ground.

Kamijou ignored that.

Odd shouts that not even he understood were pouring from his throat as he raised a leg and thrust it towards the man's ribs.

This time, the man managed to avoid the blow.

He rolled to the side.

Possibly as a measure to lighten the plane's weight due to the high cost of fuel, the inner walls were thin. The bottom of Kamijou's foot sunk into the wall.

That was when the man swung his arm.

Kamijou felt a hot sensation on the back of his calf.

When he looked down, he saw knife made of animal bone.

"…"

Kamijou did not clench his fists.

Instead he grabbed the aluminum bar that had been used as a handle on the broken in-flight meal cart that was sitting at an angle in the passageway.

Kamijou did not hesitate.

The man shrunk back from the obvious blunt weapon Kamijou held.

That was when footsteps reached Kamijou's ears

The flight attendants must have heard Kamijou breaking down the door.

At that point, it seemed the man decided what he had to do.

He put the blade into his pocket and used the nearby staircase to escape to the other floor. Kamijou wasn't sure if he should chase after the man, but he decided on heading towards Index who was lying limp in the storage closet.

"Index!!" he yelled into her ear and she moved slightly. There was a dark bruise around her neck, but she didn't seem to be in any real danger anymore.

Her small mouth moved slightly.

“What? Emergency landing…stabilizer…?”

She spoke words that Kamijou wasn’t used to hearing.

And they were words he would never have expected to hear from someone as bad with machines as Index.

That was when help finally came.

A flight attendant and a large man, the captain of the plane, appeared. Apparently, the terrorist took precedence over all else and he had left the piloting to the copilots.

They looked displeased when they saw the destroyed door to the in-flight meal heating room, but, when they saw Index collapsed on the ground and the cut on Kamijou’s calf, they picked up on the fact that something bad had happened.

Kamijou explained what had happened and then asked them a question.

“What is the emergency landing stabilizer? It’s possible Index heard the terrorist talking about it.”

“…Do you know what a belly landing is?” responded the pilot slowly. “You’ve probably heard it mentioned on the news at times. That’s when a plane lands without deploying its wheels so that it slides along the runway creating showers of sparks. Do you know how dangerous that is?”

“Well…I guess with all those sparks, the fuel tanks could ignite.”

“A passenger plane’s fuel tanks are inside the main wings. They won’t normally ignite from the belly of the plane scraping along the runway.”

“Then…?”

“It has to do with the engines. They hang down below the main wings. The Sky Bus 365 model is designed so the engines won’t contact the ground during a belly landing, but the intense vibrations will still be transferred to within the engines. Inside the rotating engine, the already highly flammable jet fuel reacts

with the air making something like a bomb. If unstable vibrations reach that area, there is a danger of it all detonating. The fire in the engine can travel down the fuel pipes and reach the tanks on the main wings causing it all to blow up." The pilot continued to explain the situation to Kamijou. "That is why there is an emergency landing stabilizer in the Sky Bus 365. It automatically detects the shock of a belly landing using sensors and completely shuts down the engines. It also seals off the fuel pipes so a fire in the engines cannot reach the fuel tanks. The plane then heads down the runway purely on inertia and decelerates."

"It completely shuts down the engines…?" Kamijou had a bad feeling deep in his chest and he expressed it in words. "So if that device were to malfunction now…"

All of them fell silent.

The pilot gave a groan and spoke.

"…I more or less understand the situation now. And that includes that your friend there was injured. It's unfortunate that we weren't any help…"

"(Like hell you understand.)" Kamijou muttered under his breath.

The pilot didn't hear him and continued speaking.

"What's most important is that you weren't hurt any worse than you were. But now that passengers have been injured and not just a crewmember, we truly can't let anyone know about this. If they found out, the other 500 passengers would wish for safety and a panic would break out."

His calm manner of speaking further pissed Kamijou off.

Even if this wasn't his problem, Kamijou just couldn't stand having these things decided for him.

"It isn't fair to you two, but we'll have to continue to keep you confined elsewhere. I have a duty to protect the lives of the passengers and, if it's necessary, I will even-…"

The next thing Kamijou knew, his right hand was moving.

As his fist swung upwards he remembered that he still had the aluminum bar in his hand.

However, he was unable to stop his hand.

With a loud impact, the pilot's body was knocked backwards.

"…Fuck that," Kamijou said in a low voice. "What do you mean you're going to protect the lives of the passengers? It's because I went along with what you said that it ended up like this! Do you understand what happened!? How the hell can you act so self-important and then not show any regret when you fail!?"

The pilot started to say something while holding his nose, but Kamijou attacked with his blunt weapon again.

"My friend was attacked!! You say you'll protect the 500 passengers, but you already let one slip through your fingers!! Do you only see people as names on pieces of paperwork! This isn't the same as protecting complete strangers as a part of your job! I have a right to kick that bastard's ass. You can do whatever the hell you want, but I'm gonna do this my way!!"

Kamijou looked over at Index who was being held by the blonde flight attendant with a nice body and tossed the bar to the side.

(…Dammit. If I had been a little more on my toes.)

He then headed off into the staircase the man wearing a suit had disappeared into.

"…You piece of shit. I'm going to keep beating you until you pass out."

Kamijou's violent words were not like his usual self.

Kamijou was not the only one who wasn't himself.

"…Ow," muttered the pilot who had suddenly been hit by the blunt weapon.

He caressed his nose with his fingers and stared off in the direction Kamijou had

left in. He slowly moved a hand to the wall where a microphone was. The flight attendants used it to inform the passengers when to put on their seatbelts, but it could also be used to give orders only to the cockpit.

The pilot set it to the channel that only went to the cockpit and spoke in a low voice.

“Wash…”

That was the name of one of the 2 copilots.

“Leave the piloting to Richmond. Yes, that’s right. It’s an emergency. You unlock the box and bring Archery here.”

The blonde flight attendant with a nice body looked at the pilot in shock after hearing that.

Archery was the sole weapon on the Sky Bus 365 that was prepared in the cockpit to prevent control of the yoke from being taken. Because of Japan’s Swords and Firearms Control Law, it was a type of bowgun, but it was not constructed much like a bow and arrow nor did it function much like one. When the trigger was pulled, nitrogen gas propelled a metal arrow larger than 40 cm in length at high speed. It was on the level of a hunting rifle.

The pilot gave a snort of contempt at the flight attendant’s dumbfounded gaze.

“…That boy won’t listen to anyone’s orders and he even laid a hand on the captain of this aircraft. He needs to be treated as a dangerous individual. Essentially, we have one more terrorist onboard. I have no intention of letting a kid who has no clue what he is doing run around on this ship.”

The flight attendant shivered at his words.

Archery would be there soon.

Part 13

Kamijou arrived at the other floor via the stairs and looked around. As it was after sunset, the passenger areas were lit with soft lighting, but the “wall” area he was in was fairly dim.

The man in the suit was nowhere to be seen.

The business class seats were to the front and the economy class seats were to the back.

In both directions, passengers had newspapers spread out, headphones in their ears, were operating the small monitors, or were passing the time some other way.

(…Which way? Which way did he go?)

Kamijou decided to go back to the economy class seats. He knew what the man looked like, but he got the feeling that every one of the people sitting in the seats was camouflaged in some way.

Kamijou did not have a perfect memory like Index.

He felt like the image of the man’s face was about to slip away despite having just seen him.

(If only I could find a way to unsettle him, he’d be easy to find…)

Kamijou clicked his tongue and then froze.

The terrorist wanted to negotiate with the British airlines regarding the destruction of the master recorders. That meant any major event would be a problem for him until the result of the negotiations was clear.

One such major event would be if the plane was about to crash.

(I see.)

Kamijou nodded and headed back to the “wall” area.

(I’ve found a way to unsettle him.)

A high-pitched buzzer reached the man’s ears.

He had gone in the opposite direction than Kamijou and was sitting naturally in his own business class seat. There was nowhere to run in a passenger plane. The best way to escape a pursuer was to mix in with the other passengers.

Sitting there, the electronic tone sounded like it was piercing his chest.

It must have been an emergency alarm because the clear oxygen masks all came down automatically in front of each seat. At first, the passengers stared at them dumbfounded, but then a commotion spread as quickly as fire spreading across hair.

(What? What the hell is going on!?)

The man looked around while gripping his armrests.

(If the oxygen masks are coming out, it means the plane is in trouble… But I haven’t loaded the necessary program yet. I haven’t taken control of the Sky Bus 365’s emergency landing stabilizer yet!!)

The high-pitched buzzer continued.

It may have been because of the passengers panicking around him, but he felt like the plane was shaking oddly.

What if some irregularity had occurred and the plane really was malfunctioning?

(This is bad.)

The man’s…no, his group’s objective was the destruction of the master recorders of the 4 major airlines in the UK. The airlines still hadn’t responded. Even if his group didn’t want it, if the Sky Bus 365 were to crash on its own…

The master recorders wouldn’t be destroyed.

And not just that. The crash would be treated as a mere accident erasing the existence of the terrorist attack altogether.

(Shit, shit, shit! I have to do something!!)

The man stood up from his seat.

He had to do something about the situation, but he had no real way of doing so.

Meanwhile, the pilot was pissed.

He now had the Sky Bus 365's sole projectile weapon, Archery, and he grabbed the microphone on the wall while frowning in response to the high-pitched buzzer.

The line was connected only to the cockpit.

"What the hell is going on!? You didn't suddenly lower our altitude did you!?"

"N-no. The aircraft is balanced. This isn't an automatic alarm from one of the instruments. It's an alarm from one of the switches."

"Those damn terrorists!!" he yelled while holding Archery.

It seemed he had lost all sense that Kamijou Touma was a passenger and was thinking of him solely as a terrorist.

"If they're going to just do whatever they want with my aircraft, then I have an idea… Hey, Richmond!! Cut off that alarm! If we know it isn't a problem with the instruments, then hurry up and run the automatic announcement! The one that says it was a false alarm and there's nothing to worry about!!"

After yelling into it, the pilot threw the microphone to the floor and lifted up Archery. That Asian had taken the stairs to the other floor. Even thought it was large, the Sky Bus 365 was still a passenger plane, so he would be able to find the boy soon enough if he searched carefully.

"Dammit. I'll stop those fools even if I have to shoot their arms and legs to do

it," he spat out and headed for the staircase.

The voice of the copilot came from the tiny speaker on the microphone he had thrown to the floor.

"C-Captain!! Emergency!!"

The microphone was supposed to be held up near one's face, so the fact that the pilot could hear the copilot from the floor showed how loudly he was yelling.

"What? Did they do something else!?"

"I don't know!" yelled the copilot in response. "J-just come back to the cockpit, please! I can't deal with this alone…Dammit. What's going on? What the hell is going on? Th-the fuel meter!! It's going down oddly! I think there might be a hole in the tank!!"

"Seriously…?"

The pilot felt a cold tension wrap around his gut.

That wasn't something one could do just by hitting an alarm on the wall. Could it have something to do with the emergency landing stabilizer?

(…What the hell is going on?)

He was holding Archery in his hands and he could most likely kill an unarmed opponent with it. He was conflicted about whether he should go after the terrorists or return to the cockpit.

"Captain, what do I do!? We aren't going to make it to the airport at this rate! We may even need to prepare for an emergency landing on a highway!!"

"Dammit!!"

With that last report from the copilot, the pilot had made up his mind.

Instead of heading for the staircase, he headed full speed for the cockpit along with the copilot who had brought him Archery.

Part 14

There was a church known as St. George's Cathedral in the London Borough of Lambeth.

St. George was a well-known name, so a lot of schools, hospitals, parks, churches, and other facilities used it. There were numerous churches named St. George's Cathedral in London. This was just one of those.

A church at nighttime usually had a cold and solemn atmosphere created by the flickering light of candles and the moonlight tinted through the stained glass, but that was not so here. There were a number of monitors set up on the pulpit and the pews and square box-shaped pieces of communication equipment with cables spreading out from them were lying on the floor. All this equipment had been provided for them by the headquarters of the science side, Academy City, due to their cooperation. The light of LCD monitors and LEDs disturbed the soft darkness of the church.

A large number of nuns were attempting to operate those unfamiliar machines and running about in confusion while two figures sat calmly in a seat.

One of them was the head of the Anglican Church faction, Archbishop Laura Stewart.

The other was the head of the Knight faction, Knight Leader.

In contrast to Laura's soft expression, Knight Leader's was stern.

"In the end, the head of the Royal Family didn't show up. And I feel not having the three factions gather to have a discussion is setting a bad example."

"…Her Majesty the Queen and the rest of the Royal Family control the police,

parliament, and a number of other related agencies and they are taking the needed effort to keep them running. She simply does not have time to come to a place like this."

Laura sighed in response to those words.

There was a clear relationship of power in the three factions of the United Kingdom.

The Royal Family faction had power over the Knight faction.

The Knight faction had power over the Anglican Church faction.

The Anglican Church faction had power over the Royal Family faction.

That was why each of them sent representatives to parliament in order to be able to declare their equivalence. If the Royal Family weakened, various things would get more difficult for Laura and the Church. She cursed the Queen internally wondering if she had purposefully run off.

Knight Leader did not realize Laura's concern and continued speaking.

"…What's important now is that the illusion you cast seems to have begun to take effect."

"Heh hehhn. It's true that completely taking remote control of a huge collection of science like a passenger plane is difficult, but using an illusion to show one false readout is simple."

"So you messed with the cockpit's fuel gauge," Knight Leader said as he glanced over at a computer set up in the cathedral.

A number of LCD monitors and meters were surrounding their two chairs. It was a training simulator identical to the cockpit of the Sky Bus 365. Apparently, it was being used to "aim" the illusion.

"They must be panicking on board right now. The gauge is going down so fast they must think there's a hole in the fuel tank. They will think there is no way they can make it to the airport."

“I see. So they will make an emergency landing on a country highway without many buildings around instead of at the airport.” Knight Leaders’ eyebrows twitched slightly out of displeasure. “It’s true that the report said the terrorists themselves were not planning on bringing the plane down immediately, but we still don’t know what the defect in the passenger plane they spoke of is. An emergency landing will be quite difficult. If something goes wrong, this could be very bad.”

“Oh? Would you prefer to let it explode in a large city, in a residential area, on the runway of the international airport, or next to the control building for the airport? In the worst case, the number of victims could be many times the number of passengers.”

“…”

Knight Leader remained silent for a brief period.

Laura grabbed a nun walking nearby with a report and asked her a question.

“What roads might they perform their emergency landing on?”

“They will most likely land in the area between Kendal and Carlisle on the highway leading to Scotland.”

Laura snapped her fingers.

Knight Leader scowled.

“…What was that a signal for?”

“Blockading that area of the highway and all roads leading into it. We also need some equipment to help deal with the terrorist. I was thinking the Knights’ Robin Hood would work well.”

“So a schemer who deceives people with the church is trying to order around the Knights, the defenders of this country.”

“I’d prefer it if you would accept the job when I’m willing to give you credit for it. According to the report, the terrorist isn’t a magician and he doesn’t seem to be carrying a gun or a bomb. If the plane manages to land safely, I doubt you'd

even be able to control the over 500 people onboard. I'm handing you a nice easy job to help you get more experience."

"Ridiculous," spat out Knight Leader. "You can rush this if you want, but what are you going to do if the plane comes apart in midair?"

"In that case, we will recover Index Librorum Prohibitorum from onboard. There's always the spell used when we captured Lidvia Lorenzetti as she was trying to escape on the charter plane. Even if the plane explodes in midair, we can catch someone from the ground *as long as its only one person*."

"From the bottom of my heart, I believe that you should have an early death."

Part 15

The man felt the plane suddenly tilt.

The nose of the plane was tilted down which meant it was quickly lowering its altitude.

(An emergency landing? Not good!!)

The man was after the destruction of the master recorders. If the plane performed an emergency landing before the UK had decided whether to go along with their demands or not, the "negotiations" could not continue.

And traditionally a passenger plane that performed an emergency landing ended up being surrounded by the police. The man had heard rumors that the thin walls and windows used in planes weren't just a method of lowering the weight to use less fuel; they were also so that a large rifle could successfully fire through them and into the plane.

A British airport or highway was enemy territory.

If the plane landed at that point, it would ruin everything.

“Shit!!”

The man ran forward through the business class area. He thought of heading straight through first class and attacking the cockpit, but he stopped partway there. The cockpit door would be built the toughest to prevent terrorist attacks. It wasn’t something he could break through without a plan.

As he did all this, the plane continued to lower its altitude.

The man felt the same odd floating sensation one felt when riding an elevator.

“I have to…I have to do something…” he mumbled to himself and entered the “wall” area between business class and first class. Just like the other “wall” area, there was a microphone on the wall for the flight attendants.

He grabbed it.

With his trembling hands, he switched it to the channel that contacted the cockpit directly and started yelling into it in French.

“Stop the emergency landing!! I’m going to bring this plane down right now!!”

“!?”

He heard someone’s breath catch on the other side of the connection.

The person must not have known how to react to the sudden threat.

The man continued yelling.

“I have control of the Sky Bus 365’s structural defect. I can bring it down at any time! If you don’t want all 500 people onboard to die, then take us back up to the proper altitude!!”

That was a complete bluff. The economy class seat was unusable and he had to get the hatch to the cargo hold open in order to go with the backup plan. However, he did not hesitate to lie.

“I can’t do that.”

The man had not expected that response.

The strained voice on the other end of the line was responding clearly.

“For some reason, the fuel gauge is dropping rapidly. We’re most likely leaking fuel. At this rate, we won’t make it to the Edinburgh airport. We can’t turn back for London either! Not to mention that the entire engine could explode if the fuel catches fire!!”

All of that didn’t matter.

The man didn’t care if the plane blew up.

To him, it only mattered that it ended as a terrorist attack.

“Dammit, I’ll fucking kill all of you! Okay, you have 3 minutes. If you don’t take us back to the proper altitude in 3 minutes, I’ll start killing the passengers one by one!!”

“Do you understand the situation here!?”

The last response was almost a shriek and the man drowned it out with his own confused voice.

“You’re the one that doesn’t understand! I have the passenger’s lives in my hands!! I have over 500 hostages. Even if I kill half of them, I’ll still have plenty left!! Don’t forget that!”

Having said what he had to say, the man put the microphone back on the wall as if he were striking the wall with it. He then sank down and sat on the floor.

He reached for the bone knife in his pocket.

Would they go back up or continue going down?

His teeth chattered as he put all his focus on the angle of the plane.

Part 16

Archbishop Laura Stewart frowned within St. George's Cathedral.

"…How very odd."

"What?" responded Knight Leader.

Laura wasn't looking at a monitor; she was looking at a whiteboard to the side. A map of the UK was stuck to it with a few round magnets, but a lone magnet was moving across the map.

"The passenger plane is raising its altitude. It looks as if they have cancelled the emergency landing."

"Did you order for the illusion to be removed?"

"No."

Laura started muttering as if to herself.

"I wouldn't remove the illusion until they had landed on the highway. And yet the long distance illusion lost its effect. This is…"

"Archbishop! Emergency!!" said a young Anglican nun who was running over. "We have discovered large scale interference coming from the direction of Scotland. Our illusion was sealed by a third party!! The fuel gauge has gone back to normal!!"

"Interference…?"

Laura's eyebrows twisted in displeasure for the first time that night.

(Who? And for what purpose…?)

Obviously, this was magical interference. However, the terrorists were confirmed to be mere criminals with no connection to magic. It seemed unlikely that there

would be any magicians helping them.

“From Scotland… The interference is coming from within the UK.”

Knight Leader’s expression turned to one much more easily understood than Laura’s.

It was an expression of anger.

“When did French magicians get into the country? Or has a British magic cabal betrayed us? Either way, this is your mistake, Archbishop. I thought you were using the full power of the Anglican Church in order to avoid this kind of trouble before it happened.”

“…I know that.”

There was definitely a violent fury within Laura Stewart that was not shown in her expression. She spoke to express her emotion.

“There’s something more to this than some delinquents who like flashy things.”

Laura snapped her fingers.

Immediately thereafter, an orange point of light appeared behind her. It was the lit tip of a cigarette. Laura spoke to the magician who was holding the cigarette in his mouth.

“Just in case, I’d like for you to make preparations regarding the Sky Bus 365. What do you need?”

“Let’s see,” said the red-haired priest quietly as he exhaled smoke. “I’ll need a means of transport. The Knights control the military forces, so could you have them contact the Air Force?”

Part 17

The man raised his head.

The plane’s angle had changed. In the reverse of before, the nose was now angled up.

They were going back up to a higher altitude.

(I stopped…the emergency landing?)

The man looked around while breathing erratically.

They must have done something in the cockpit, because the high-pitched buzzer

had stopped. Automatic announcements in different languages were informing the passengers that it had been a false alarm and not to worry.

(Did it all…work out?)

In the “wall” area between business class and first class, the man finally relaxed. The plan for the terrorist attack was still stalled, but he hadn’t completely failed. If he could figure out a way to get the hatch to the cargo hold open, he could turn things around.

That was when…

“So there you are.”

The man turned in shock towards the sudden voice.

The spiky-haired Asian was standing in the entrance to the business class area.

Kamijou Touma didn’t completely understand the situation.

He had hit the emergency alarm, but he hadn’t done anything to cause the plane’s rapid descent. He assumed the pilots must have done something.

After causing enough chaos to unsettle the terrorist, Kamijou had looked around for someone taking any irregular actions.

And he had found him.

He was in the “wall” area between business class and first class.

The man had been holding a microphone and yelling towards the cockpit.

“…”

The man stared blankly at Kamijou’s face for a few seconds.

He then reached for his pocket.

His bone knife was most likely there.

The carefully carved knife was sharp enough to sever an artery or pierce an organ and a metal detector wouldn't pick it up.

That was why Kamijou made his move before the man could get his hand out from his pocket.

He quickly moved in close to the man and used his palm to forcefully press against the man's elbow that was bent in order to retrieve the knife.

Seeing the movement of his own arm from the push, the man's body stiffened.

Kamijou spoke to the man not particularly caring whether he knew Japanese or not.

"Do you really want to be stabbed by your own blade?"

"!?"

A cold sweat came over the man and he spun his body in order to shake off Kamijou's arm. But before he could, Kamijou swung his own head back and then forcefully struck the man's forehead with it.

After a loud impact, the man staggered back.

Kamijou kneed the man in the gut to close the gap that had opened between them.

The man's body hovered in the air for a second before collapsing to the ground. Kamijou started in for another attack, but…

"…"

The man reached into his suit pocket and gave a slight smile.

"No complaints, right?"

Kamijou did not understand French, but he got from the tone that they were words of triumph.

Before Kamijou could move, the man pulled the knife from his pocket.

No matter how one thought about it, someone with a knife had an advantage over someone who was unarmed. Even if they struck each other at the same time, the man would only get punched while Kamijou would get stabbed in the gut and die.

…Or so it should have been.

The bone knife had broken in two at the base when Kamijou had kneed the man.

"…Seriously?"

The man stared at the base of the knife he was holding until he suddenly realized something and looked up.

He did so just in time to see Kamijou Touma slowly approaching with his fist clenched as hard as stone.

Kamijou spoke in Japanese knowing that the man probably couldn't understand him.

"No complaints, right?"

The sound of repeated blows could be heard.

On this occasion, Kamijou Touma did not feel that one punch was enough.

Part 18

The terrorist lay on the ground in a small room in the "wall" area between business class and first class having been tied up by Kamijou.

The rapid lowering of the fuel gauge seemed to have been a misreading by the

pilots, so it didn't seem to be a problem. (The captain appeared to be in a bad mood and unwilling to speak to Kamijou, so the blonde flight attendant with a nice body had relayed that information to him.) They had stopped the emergency landing, raised their altitude, and were headed to the Edinburgh airport as originally planned.

Kamijou was worried about Index because the man had strangled her, but she had a different outlook.

"Beef or fish! Beef or fish! If the problem is solved, then all that's left is to eat the airplane food!!"

"…Index-san. That's a rather peaceful comment for someone who was threatened with a knife and then strangled to the point of leaving a dark bruise."

Everything should have been going fine by that point.

However…

"…"

"What is it, Touma?"

Something didn't fit. He had this odd feeling like having lost a piece of a jigsaw puzzle before he could complete the picture.

"Why did that guy choose this time for his terrorist attack?"

"Well, it seems he was from an anti-England group, so didn't he just want to cause a problem in British airspace?"

The flight attendant had a suspicious look on her face. It may have been because she didn't want Kamijou moving around anymore. But Kamijou spoke as he thought.

"But it seemed he was afraid of the plane performing an emergency landing within the UK and bringing the negotiations to an end. …If he had hurried up and made his move, there would have been much more time for the negotiations. Then they could have done all sorts of things to disturb the UK into giving in."

“Either way, he’s been captured. You don’t have to worry about it.”

During all this, the flight attendant was also trying to pacify Index who was still yelling “Beef or fish!!”

(Am I over thinking this? If he had hijacked the plane early on, the pilot could have landed the plane at an airport in whatever country they were above at the time. But…)

Kamijou slowly paced around as he thought.

(Hypothetically, if there were a reason he had to wait and act when he did, what could that reason be? If the plan was just to send the emailed threat to the British airlines and have them destroy the master recorders as instructed, there would be no reason it had to be done over British airspace. Wherever the plane crashed, it wouldn’t have changed that a flight headed for the UK had been attacked.)

And it was clear this wasn’t something the terrorists was making up on the fly. They had made sure to test their control of the emergency landing stabilizer by stopping the engines of other flights for 15 seconds.

If they had simulated their plan again and again, surely they would have come up with ways to deal with every situation they could think of. Would their plan really end because the man onboard couldn’t use the emergency landing stabilizer?

There had to be something.

Was there some kind of secondary plan that acted as insurance?

(…There had to be a reason why he waited until the last hour of a 10 hour flight to make his move.)

The only special thing that had happened in that time was…

(Oh, I see. We stopped at the Paris airport and loaded on extra cargo!!)

Kamijou finally stopped pacing.

He spoke to Index and the flight attendant who both had puzzled looks on their

faces.

“…There’s another one.”

“?”

“The cargo hold!! He waited until we had taken on the cargo at the Paris airport to make his move. Now why would he do that? It has to be because he was waiting for a partner to enter the Sky Bus 365 hidden in the cargo!!”

Index and the flight attendant looked startled at Kamijou’s words.

“Someone who enters the plane as a normal passenger can’t bring weapons aboard, but his partner got onboard with the containers. If a problem occurred and their first plan couldn’t be carried out, he could just open the hatch that can only be opened from this side and move to the second plan.”

“So the reason he didn’t attack for the first 9 hours of the flight was that he was waiting to meet up with his partner in France? That’s why he waited until the containers had been loaded before making his move?”

“If so, things could get bad if we don’t do anything,” Kamijou said as he tapped the floor with the soles of his shoes. “This person got into the cargo hold without going through a normal checkpoint. The guy in the cargo hold is most likely armed with guns or a bomb. Once he figures out their plan failed, he may use that firepower to take everyone down with them.”

The passenger plane was flying at an altitude of 10,000 meters, so the air was quite thin. It would be difficult for a human to breathe. Because of that, passenger planes artificially regulated the air pressure to make it more comfortable for humans. It was much like putting air in a balloon.

A bullet could easily open a hole in the body of the balloon-like plane. Once that happened, it was all over. The air would all move to escape the plane at once, so a small hole could still cause quite a bit of damage.

“…Is that the only entrance to the cargo hold?”

“Y-yes. A copilot-level or higher card key is needed to unlock it.”

The flight attendant must not have known much about the cargo hold because her expression looked doubtful as she responded.

“A card key, huh? …It’ll probably be difficult to get that pilot to help.”

The pilot did have Archery, but Kamijou doubted he would lend him that projectile weapon. Kamijou had managed to restore his honor by defeating the terrorist, but he doubted the pilot had gotten over his personal feelings towards Kamijou.

The flight attendant then spoke.

“…The captain may not help, but I may be able to get a card key from one of the copilots.”

“…Really?”

“Of course, there’s no way I would be able to get Archery.”

The flight attendant sounded apologetic about that, but Kamijou was just glad that he could get the hatch to the cargo hold open.

“Also, the cargo hold is divided into 3 blocks. The cargo taken on in France is all in the center block.”

The odds were good the that terrorist would be there.

But there was only one entrance.

“…Immediately after the door is opened will be the most dangerous point.”

“But there’s no other way in,” the flight attendant said hesitantly.

“Wait. Could I use the ventilation ducts?”

“That won’t work like it does in the movies. The ducts in the Sky Bus 365 are only 30 cm wide. There’s simply no way a human could fit in there.”

“No, that’s not what I meant.”

“?”

“What *do* you mean, Touma?”

Kamijou responded to the flight attendant and Index who were staring at him blankly.

“There were bottles of coffee and tea at the free drink corner, right? Get me those. If they’re cold, reheat them in the microwave. I just need them to be really, really hot.”

Part 19

A number of square containers were lined up in the cargo hold.

These containers were not the long ones that were loaded on tankers in harbors. They were dice-like cubes with 2 meter edges. Also, they were made of light aluminum instead of iron. The airline’s logo was displayed on their silver surfaces.

One of those containers was sitting open and a man was leaning up against its side.

His name was Eiker Lugoni.

He was wearing the work uniform of Paris’s international airport and had a new handgun in his hand. The bag at this feet contained grenades, plastic explosives, and other explosives. However, those explosives were only for the worst case scenario.

If possible, he didn’t want to use any conventional weapons.

For this plan, Eiker and the others had received information and shelter from a

number of other organizations that had been willing to cooperate. The deal had been to teach the organizations what they knew in exchange for help hijacking a plane without using any real weapons.

If they failed to use the emergency landing stabilizer for their new type of terrorism, they would end up being treated as a joke.

Yet there seemed to be no signs of the primary plan having succeeded.

Most likely, the “negotiations” using the Sky Bus 365 had failed. The UK wasn’t going to go along with their demands now because they couldn’t damage them anymore.

The time for the 2nd plan – the worst case scenario – was approaching.

(…I suppose it’s about time.)

In the dim cargo hold, Eiker looked down at the watch on his thick wrist. The plane would be arriving in Edinburgh soon and there was still no sign of Musset, his partner who was supposed to be in the passenger area, having made his move. Whether he had lost his nerve or screwed it up somehow, it didn’t feel like the plan was going well.

At the very least, Eiker wanted to take down that plane.

Using the explosives he had, he might be able to destroy the hatch, but he wasn’t going to do anything so indirect.

Eiker decided to wait 5 more minutes, and, if nothing had happened, he would attack the cargo bay door. If a hole was opened in that outer wall, the power of the air rushing out would destroy the Sky Bus 365. Eiker and Musset would be treated as jokes for not getting the proper results, but it was better than not getting any results at all.

That was when he heard what sounded like a metal sheet being dented. And he didn’t hear it just once. He heard it multiple times.

He looked around to find the source of the noise and finally looked up.

The noise was coming from there. There was a duct stretching across the ceiling.

One of the metal sheets making up the duct was bent in multiple places as if something were moving down it bit by bit.

(…You've gotta be kidding me… Is this an attempt at a surprise attack?)

It was a common scene in movies, but the ducts in the Sky Bus 365 were simply too small and thin for a human to pass through. It was true that coming in through the sole entrance would be suicide, but getting trapped and unable to move in the narrow duct would be just as stupid.

Eiker pointed his handgun above his head.

He heard the denting noise once more.

He carefully aimed and fired repeatedly into the bent spot.

Perhaps to help with the high cost of fuel, the walls of the duct were extremely thin. The bullets easily opened finger-tip sized holes in the duct and a hot liquid spilled out.

That's right: A hot liquid.

But it was too hot to be human blood.

"Wha-…!?"

The stabbing pain felt as strong as if he had touched sulfuric acid. He could tell what the light red liquid was from the smell. It was tea. He was covered in the boiling liquid that was even then giving off steam.

Because of this, Eiker did not notice that Kamijou had entered the cargo hold matching the opening and closing of the hatch with the gunshots so as to hide the noise.

"Hey, terrorist. Do you know about thermal expansion?"

When objects were heated, their volume changed. An easy-to-understand example was the denting noise made when boiling water was poured into a stainless steel sink. Kamijou had poured the tea down the duct to distract Eiker.

“!!”

Eiker unhesitatingly turned his gun towards the voice that had spoken to him.

But before he could, Kamijou threw the contents of the bucket he was holding in both hands at Eiker as if he were putting out a fire in the kitchen.

The contents had been boiling coffee.

What happens to someone who has that poured over them needs no explanation.

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!”

Eiker screamed and writhed around and Kamijou smiled as he threw the empty bucket aside. He lightly kicked the handgun Eiker had dropped and it sank into the puddle of boiling coffee.

But Eiker did not stop there.

While still screaming, he grabbed Kamijou’s collar with both hands and lifted him up. Kamijou had just enough time to shudder at the feeling of his feet floating in the air when Eiker slammed him to the floor. With a loud impact, a shock ran up Kamijou’s back and the breath was knocked from his lungs.

“Gh…bh…!?”

Kamijou couldn’t breathe, but he didn’t have time to even have a proper coughing fit.

Eiker brought his hand to the back of his hip and pulled out a large knife.

“!!”

Eiker swung the knife down directly for Kamijou’s face and Kamijou swung just his head forcefully to the side. A high-pitched noise resounded from just next to his ear. It seemed about half the knife had broken off when it struck the floor, but Eiker brought it down for a second strike regardless.

Kamijou reached his hand toward the ground.

He grabbed the broken portion of the blade with his fingers and stabbed into

Eiker’s thigh as he knelt over him.

Eiker let out another scream.

Eiker staggered to the side and Kamijou rolled in the opposite direction in an attempt to get some distance between them.

But he soon realized that had been a mistake.

Eiker was now kneeling on one knee next to the puddle of coffee. And sunk in the center of the puddle that was still giving off steam was the handgun Kamijou had kicked over there.

Eiker did not hesitate to grab it.

Handguns were made of many different substances, but the one Eiker had was made of stainless steel. This meant it was a good conductor of heat. As the gun was immersed in the boiling liquid, it would be extremely hot, but Eiker still grabbed it. His expression was one of rage.

“…I will bring down this plane.” Eiker was covered in burns and he spoke to Kamijou in Japanese probably to match the language Kamijou had spoken to him in. “The Eurotunnel explosion damaged France greatly. That’s why we have to cause the same amount of damage to them. They took out the land route, so we’ll take out the air route!!”

“There’s no proof England did that.”

There were a number of containers in the area. There might have been something Kamijou could use as a weapon in one of them, but Eiker wouldn’t give him a chance to open them up and check.

“An island country like England had no reason to destroy their sole land route!! If they did that, they would only be damaging themselves. In fact, they're suffering because of it now!!”

“That isn’t necessarily true,” said Eiker while the scorching handgun was more or less fusing his palm. “At one point in the past, construction of the Eurotunnel was stopped due to military and political problems. That tunnel is an important land route between France and England, but there are still people who refuse to

accept it and would sever the connection."

"…"

"As a sign of our friendship with England, we allowed joint management of the Eurotunnel. And yet they cut off that connection from their own side!!"

"…Do you have any proof of that?" asked Kamijou cautiously. "Is either side really at fault here? Is there really any reason to fight over this!? A flight attendant told me what is in these containers. It's liquid foods for people who can't eat normal food. A French food company makes it and its being brought over to save people in England!! Isn't that the real connection between England and France? Most people in the world aren't part of crazy conspiracies like you are!!"

"It's true that not everyone in England is at fault, but there are idiots everywhere. I'm not going to let those idiots get away just because they hide among the innocent people."

As Eiker spoke, he gathered strength in the finger holding the handgun's trigger.

His senses must have numbed, because he was smiling.

"Whatever happens, you will die here, so it isn't a problem you need to worry about."

"…You're going to shoot that gun that was submerged in coffee?"

"Guns these days can still fire after being sunk in mud for half an hour. I highly doubt getting it a little wet is going to stop the bullet from firing. But I suppose a Japanese boy can't be blamed for not knowing anything about guns."

After speaking, Eiker immediately pulled the trigger.

Kamijou instinctually started to shut his eyes, but he just barely managed to keep them open.

And…

The gun made a clicking noise, but that was it. No bullet came shooting from the

barrel.

This was not due to the safety being on nor was it due to being out of ammo.

Eiker stood dumbfounded pulled the trigger a second and third time while Kamijou clenched his right fist.

“Do you know about thermal expansion?”

“!?”

Instead of waiting for a response, Kamijou let his fist fly. A dull sensation spread from Eiker’s face to the rest of his body. But he still did not collapse. Kamijou then clenched his left fist.

“It was just like with the duct before. When objects are heated, their volume changes!”

His left fist flew.

Eiker’s head swung back from the impact.

“It’s the same with the gun parts! One or two small parts warped while the gun was submerged in the boiling liquid!!”

Kamijou struck with his right fist again and this time Eiker was taken down.

Kamijou exhaled deeply.

Guns worked by detonating gunpowder which created a small blast that propelled the bullet. Guns would heat up if 100 or 200 shots were fired in a row, so they were made to withstand heat fairly well. But that could then become a weakness in places where the gun wouldn’t heat up while being fired normally.

(…Really it was a bit of a gamble whether the gun would actually fail or not. You could almost say I was fortunate…No, I was well within the misfortune category by running into the terrorists in the first place.)

In any case, he concluded that, unless a third terrorist appeared out of nowhere, the Sky Bus 365 was safe.

Kamijou finally relaxed.

But then he heard a noise.

He looked over and saw Eiker quietly standing back up. At his feet was a bag. He was pulling a grenade from the bag.

"…!!"

Kamijou hurriedly moved to grab Eiker's arms, but Eiker was faster. With a huge smile on his face, he held the grenade in one hand and reached for the pin with the other.

At that rate, it was going to detonate.

Kamijou had nowhere to run in the confined space. It was most likely an anti-personnel grenade, but it would still damage the outer wall of the Sky Bus 365. If that happened, it was all over. The passenger plane would go down.

That was when Kamijou heard a sudden voice.

"I see you're as much of an amateur as ever. Your hesitation to kill puts those around you at risk."

Kamijou recognized the male voice.

Eiker frowned at the odd turn of events, but nothing was stopping him from pulling the pin.

And then…

Part 20

The pilot noticed a slight noise while he was in the cockpit gripping the yoke. He looked over at the radar and saw an odd dot. He then moved his gaze out the window and his shoulders jumped in surprise.

A large pitch black transport plane that must have had stealth functionality was flying very close nearby.

It was only about 10 meters away. It was much like an aerial refueling, but that was something that only worked with small fighter jets. With two large aircrafts each 80 meters long, it went beyond the realm of acrobatics and into the realm of suicide.

The blonde flight attendant with a nice body was shocked when she looked out the window while walking down a business class aisle. The back of a transport plane was opening and something was scattering out from it. She didn't know what the confetti-like objects being scattered at high altitude were, but she innocently thought it was a beautiful sight.

Index was in front of the hatch connecting to the cargo hold waiting for Kamijou to return. The commotion people were causing drew her eyes to a window and what she saw there astonished her. The knowledge she had from 103,000 grimoires told her that the confetti-like objects were rune cards.

And then something unusual happened at the cargo hold wall near Eiker.

Something orange erupted from the wall. It was a sword. The sword made of flames pierced the outer wall of the passenger plane and arrived inside.

The flame sword singed Eiker's clothes, but it did not damage his flesh.

Then the controller of the sword drew it back regardless of whether the result would be good or bad.

Immediately afterwards, a large wind started blowing.

All the air in the cargo hold started moving towards the hole near Eiker.

Of course, the first one affected was Eiker.

Eiker's body was thrown against the wall almost like a violently slammed door. His abdomen was sucked into the hole. The Sky Bus 365 avoided being torn to pieces by the plug known as Eiker.

But…

"Gggggaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!?" Eiker screamed as his flesh continued to be sucked into the hole.

His flesh was almost literally being torn away.

Seeing this ridiculous scene, Kamijou heard only the flame magician's voice.

"The plane will be landing in Edinburgh in 10 minutes. Let's see if he can survive that long. Whether I like it or not, you bear the title of that girl's manager, so I'd like for you to show me your resolve."

Having said what he had to say, the transmitted voice suddenly cut off.

Kamijou stared blankly for a bit, but then he realized Eiker still had the grenade in his hand as he screamed. He was attempting to pull the pin while he was almost foaming at the mouth.

Kamijou knocked the grenade away with a hand and it rolled a good distance away amusingly easily.

Eiker had now lost his last piece of resistance and Kamijou spoke to him with a smile.

"Hang in there."

Part 21

The person behind it all saw the news on TV.

The Sky Bus 365 had landed in the Edinburgh airport in Scotland. According to the news, the plane had been in trouble at one point, but the passengers and crew worked together to resolve the problem. While watching that cheerful news, the person behind it all looked over various documents.

The piece of information this person was bothered by was the transport plane.

A single Royal Air Force transport plane had been borrowed to resolve the problem.

It had been a stealth transport plane that used technology borrowed from Academy City. It had an extremely small radar cross-section.

The person sighed.

(The country of England is at its limit.)

The person was discouraged by the fact that Academy City technology had been necessary to solve such a small problem. Could it really be turned into a strong country in that state? A war between the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church was just an empty dream. …At the very least, people who had to borrow the power of others to fight couldn’t be the leaders.

The person behind it all turned off the TV, gathered up the documents, and put them in order while quietly thinking.

(It looks like we really do have to make our move.)

Between the lines 2

Hey.

This makes the second time you've saved me, doesn't it?

That's right. I thought I had safely escaped the land under control of the Russian Orthodox Church, but then they joined forces with the Roman Catholic Church. Thanks to that, the Russians managed to extend their reach to the Roman Catholic land of France. I was in quite a pinch. This kind of chase scene is tough for this old man's body to bear.

We had finally managed to reorganize the organization and change its name, but thanks to you the Astrological Surgery Brigade is quite popular.

Anyway, I'm going to at least thank you this time. Last time…well, we were a bit desperate just looking after ourselves and then you disappeared without a word. I regret not thanking you.

Yes, yes. As long as you rely on us, that's enough.

I suppose what you need is…a weapon.

But what kind of situation lead to *you* losing your weapon? …I probably shouldn't ask. Hey, don't glare at me like that. I just imagine it was something pretty bad.

Anyway, I've got a pretty nice collection of weapons. Now that we're free of the shackles of Russia, I've been going all over the world. I've been finding, gathering, and making a business out of weapons new and old from all over the world. I even have some of those monstrously sized ones you like so much, but they're pretty rare.

I can bring some out so you can test them out.

You say you'll end up destroying the weapon? Y'know, I'm not going to bring

out some piece of crap when I'm trying to repay a debt. I'm going to show you my best, not something cheap. I'll show you some true swords. They go beyond having left their mark on history; they can still very well make new marks on history.

…Wait, don't go yet. Since my terrible introduction was so easily destroyed, I suppose this isn't my place. Just come here. I'll lead you to my number one weapon that I was reluctant to bring out until now.

Ahn? I'm not putting on airs of importance. This just isn't something I can bring out on my own. I could move it using heavy machinery, but it would just be faster for you to do it.

This way. This way.

Yes, yes. On the back there. Remove the ropes and the cloth.

Well?

I may be biased, but isn't it amazing?

It's the Holy Sword Ascalon.

Ha ha. Don't look so puzzled. I know, I know. In the real legend, there's no sword with that name. This is a spiritual item created by an artist at the end of the 16th century based on the legend of the holy sword. It was created on the idea of calculating out what precisely would be needed to slay the 50 foot long dragon from the legend if it had actually existed. This is a true monster-slaying weapon.

It's a mass of steel that weighs 200 kilograms and is 3.5 meters long.

A certain author wrote that it was a one-handed falchion, but when a holy sword that could actually slay a dragon was created, it ended up being so ridiculously huge.

Take it. There's no one it suits better than you.

You must have it tough, too.

When you saved the “former” Astrological Surgery Brigade, it was supposed to have been nothing more than an irregular happening. You were never supposed to come into contact with us in the first place, and now you’re asking us to supply you with a weapon. It looks to me like you’re rushing to prepare for battle.

Well, I’m sure you’ll go off to fight no matter what I say. And I won’t try to stop you. But there’s one thing I’d like to give you before you go. It’s something I was given by a certain artisan who lives in England. Just like me, he seems to be someone who couldn’t easily forget you after you suddenly disappeared. It seems you said to dispose of the plans, but that old man finished it in secret.

Ha ha. You don’t have to scowl that much at the sight of it.

Even if there were various circumstances surrounding it, you were the one that hired him to make it, right?

It’s your heraldry, after all.

Chapter 3: Magic Cabal of the British Labyrinth.
N∴L∴

Part 1

After all that, they finally landed in Edinburgh.

Edinburgh was a city in Scotland, the northern part of the United Kingdom. London was in the south. They had to switch to a domestic flight to get to London.

“There certainly were a lot of TV cameras there. I guess it was because of the terrorist attack.”

Kamijou had managed to get through the immigration gate with the little bit of English he knew and he was checking the time on his cell phone.

“Hm? Oh, that’s right. I have to correct for the time difference.”

The phone most likely had a function to switch the clock to the times of the different major cities in the world, but Kamijou wasn’t the kind of person that read thick instruction books. He put the phone back in his pocket and looked around until he found a clock on the wall.

“….8 at night… We’re not almost at the last flight again, are we?” muttered Kamijou as he knew very little about airplane schedules.

“Tou-grrrr-ma-grrrr…”

“Ee!? I-Index-san!! I think I heard some beast-like growling in the middle of my name there!”

“That’s because I’m starving and starving and starving and about to collapse!! The beef or fish never came and I didn’t get to eat anything! Any more of this and I’m going to die!! If I don’t get anything to eat, I’m really going to die!!”

Index was still wearing the dress instead of her nun’s habit (even on a domestic flight, taking those safety pins on a plane was a bad idea), and she was swinging her arms around at full force in her attempt to appeal Kamijou for some food. In response, he sat down on his suitcase and crossed his arms as he thought.

“Won’t there be an in-flight meal on the domestic flight?”

“I have a feeling there won’t!! I have no proof, but I have a feeling there won’t!!”

It was true that, according to the flight schedule, the Edinburgh to London flight was only an hour long. It was possible they wouldn’t provide a meal on such a short flight.

Kamijou continued to think.

“…No, I’m hungry, too. Let’s go get something to eat.”

“Tooouuumaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

“You’re too happy!! That’s scary! There are stars in your eyes! I think this is the most dynamic smile I’ve ever seen!!”

As they spoke back and forth, Kamijou took Index along as he began searching for the airport’s light meal area. He had started studying English using an app on his phone, but he was still a ways away from knowing enough to be practical. But he managed to find his way through the vast airport by relying on the knife & fork and coffee cup symbols on the signs.

(I’m pretty sure there was some British currency in the luggage Tsuchimikado gave us. I suppose this qualifies as a necessary use.)

“T-Touma! I smell coffee from over there!!”

“Eh? I don’t smell anythi-…What!? There really is a café around the corner here!!”

In front of Kamijou was a stylish coffee shop with glass on all sides. He felt that people truly used to travelling would disapprove of them going to a chain store that they had in Japan after coming all the way to the UK, but for a normal lower middle class person (who helped stop a terrorist attack) like Kamijou Touma, he felt like shouting “Yay, food!!”

He was almost like how Index normally was. And speaking of Index… "

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☆☆☆☆☆☆☆ !!”

“Wah, wah, waaaahhh!! Index, those aren’t even words!! Those eyes! Those eyebrows! Those lips! Really, your face as a whole looks rather amazing!!”

Kamijou renewed his resolve to get in the café as soon as possible to start eating a ham and lettuce sandwich and he grabbed her hand to pull her towards the glass entrance.

That was when someone suddenly tapped his shoulder from behind.

He turned around and found a girl standing there. She was about 18 years old. She had Asian facial features and was greater than average height. Her long black hair was tied in a ponytail and yet still stretched down to her waist. She was wearing a pair of jeans with one leg cut clean off all the way to the top and a t-shirt tied so her navel was visible. Above the shirt, she was wearing a jacket with one sleeve cut off so her arm was bared. But what drew the most attention was the ridiculously huge Japanese sword Shichiten Shichitou that was hanging from her belt that looked like something a gunman from a western would wear.

“Long time no see,” she said.

Hearing those words, Kamijou responded.

“Wh-why is the Fallen Angel Ero Maid here…!?”

The Japanese sword girl, Kanzaki Kaori, started coughing. As she struggled to breathe gasping in air, she desperately moved her lips.

“Th-the British Royal Family requested that I bring you and Index to Buckingham Palace. If you had just taken the non-stop flight on the supersonic passenger plane prepared by Academy City, I wouldn’t have had to do this.”

“That doesn’t really answer my question. There’s no real reason that had to be done by the Fallen Angel Ero Maid!!”

“I am not a fallen angel, I am not erotic, and I am not a maid!! I-it’s true that… after the battle with Acqua, I…did v-v-various things. I admit that. But ‘Fallen Angel Ero Maid’ should not be the first words out of your mouth when you see me!!”

“I can’t help it!! That really was a fallen angel-like ero maid!!”

“Stop recalling the details and getting distracted!! D-don’t blush like that!!”

Kanzaki was shaking Kamijou by his shoulders, but it seemed as if Kamijou was not looking at her in the eyes.

“A-anyway!! I am not that kind of indecent person! I have come to get you as a messenger of the Anglican Church and as the Priestess of the new Amakusa Church. I am not embarrassed!!”

“Isn’t that a bad idea in and of itself? I mean, you’re walking around an airport with a sword! What did you even come here for today! Whenever 2 or 3 magicians gather, it’s always bad news!! Just tell me what’s going on!!”

Index finally cut into the argument between Kamijou and Kanzaki.

“Tooouuumaaaa…”

Her gaze was not on Kamijou or Kanzaki. She was staring at the stylish coffee shop.

“…If you drag this out any longer, I’ll never forgive you.”

“Ehhh!? You’re saying this is my fault!? I wouldn’t say so! How is it my fault that terrorists attacked the plane or that Kanzaki started talking to us!?”

He attempted to argue his case, but it didn’t get through to Index as she was

being controlled by her empty stomach. Kamijou decided that he had to quickly end the conversation with Kanzaki and head to the café with Index.

That was when Kanzaki Kaori the Ero Maid spoke.

“Th-that’s right. Food. You need to hurry, because we don’t have much time.”

(Ohh, she understands!! A girl that can pick up on the mood is so wonderful!! And I’m pretty hungry myself!!)

Kamijou started towards the café, but then Kanzaki continued speaking.

“Due to the terrorist attack, all the other flights have been cancelled so they can inspect all the planes. I have a helicopter and a pilot ready, so we’ll head to London that way.”

“…….”

Kamijou remained silent for a bit and then looked towards her.

“…What do you mean?”

“You were originally supposed to head directly to London in the Academy City supersonic passenger plane. However, you hurriedly switched to a different plane putting us 7 hours late already. We can’t delay this any longer. Index Librorum Prohibitorum was summoned with an official order by England, so you need to do your duty as her guardian. …By the way, she needs to change into her Walking Church nun’s habit. There’s a space in the back of the helicopter she can use to change.”

“…What about the food?”

“There’s no time to eat. Come with me. If you were just making us wait, it wouldn’t be a problem, but right now you’re keeping the entirety of the British Royal Family waiting. You’ve neglected to follow up on a promise made with those of royal blood for 7 hours without contacting anyone…I’d be less worried about the Royal Family itself and more worried about how the obstinate Knights would react if they knew.”

Kanzaki Kaori dragged Kamijou along by the hand while talking about things he

didn’t understand. He then tried to explain what he felt was most important.

“Let me repeat: What about the food!? Index-san has been at her limit for a while now!! I have a feeling that her anger will bring forth a tremendous energy if we leave her hungry for much longer!”

“You are her manager, so you do something about it.”

“How can you act like it isn’t your fault!? …Wait, are you mad? Did I make you mad by teasing you about the Fallen Angel Ero Maid thing!?”

“No, not at all. I’m perfectly calm, so just get on the helicopter already.”

Kanzaki used the strength of a Saint to drag Kamijou by the arm.

Part 2

The third princess of England, Villian, stood in a large room.

That space half the size of a tennis court was Villian’s territory. Simply put, it was her private room. The Royal Family had constant political intrigue not just inside and outside of the country, but in their home as well. Her room was the sole safe place she could shut it all out and be alone in.

“…I see. Yes, yes. That the plane managed to land in Edinburgh safely is what matters most.”

Villian was holding the receiver for an antique phone with a ceramic surface. Apparently, the line went through a cutting-edge switchboard in Buckingham Palace that heavily encrypted the signal, but she didn’t know much about technology.

She was talking with the person in charge of the Edinburgh airport.

What Villian was currently worried about was the cargo packed on that plane.

“Yes. I think you should inspect everything because of the terrorist attack, but please make sure the liquid foods get to the individual households as quickly as possible. For the people who cannot eat normal foods, this is literally a matter of life or death. …Yes. Please give them relief as soon as you can.”

Villian slowly put down the receiver and gave a light sigh.

It was possible the intelligence agency had been listening in (regardless of whether it had been encrypted or not), but she hadn’t said anything she didn’t mind anyone hearing.

The United Kingdom was a complicated nation.

It was made up of four cultures: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

It contained three factions: the Royal Family, the Knights, and the Anglican Church.

The interconnections between those two categories formed the United Kingdom. Depending on the situation, one knight from England and another from Scotland could get into a fight and a member of the Royal Family from Wales and a member of the church from Wales could have a connection between them.

Of course, as the third princess, Villian was part of the Royal Family. She had been since the moment she was born. The only way to join the Royal Family faction was to either be a descendant of the monarch or demonstrate one’s political skill as a close aide of a member. Theirs was the faction that represented the nation, but it had significantly fewer members than the knights or the church.

The Royal Family’s duty was to intervene and seize control of the parliamentary government in order to take substantial control of the country. While the knights and the church worked in the shadows, the Royal Family had the most power in a public sense because it needed to be able to control the police and the military.

That said, Third Princess Villian had no real power.

The three daughters of the Queen of England had the following qualities:

The eldest daughter had intellect.

The second daughter had military might.

The third daughter had a natural benevolence.

In other words, despite Villian's popularity, she had no trump card with which to move the country. The man from the Edinburgh airport she had spoken to on the phone had likely thought she was very kind for being worried about that kind of thing, but he wasn't about to swear his eternal loyalty to her or anything.

Her benevolence did not give her connections within the factions.

Her sisters would say that everything she did was wasted effort.

Her duty was to be treated as the public face of the Royal Family by the media and, in the common magazines, she was referred to as the princess people would most like to marry, but that was the entirety of her role within the Royal Family.

The prospect of a political marriage with her was used to make foreign leaders lose focus, but the idea of marriage was just bait and not a serious offer. The queen and her sisters would use the opening this created to negotiate the best treaty for England.

Keeping up her etiquette as a member of the Royal Family and carrying out her official duties gracefully made Villian feel like she was a mental stripper. And if England was ever in an unavoidable crisis, she would probably actually be forced into a political marriage.

"…"

Villian gave a heavy sigh in the large room.

The recent quarrel between England and France was enough to suggest the possibility of that terrible trump card.

Her thoughts were then cut off by a small knock.

“Lady Villian.”

The person calling out to her from the other side of the thick door was a young maid. She was a civilian who knew nothing of magic. There were special workers for the Royal Family, the royal maids, that were essentially a type of shrine maiden because they looked after the royalty who were traditionally said to gain their authority by having a piece of divine power, but Villian chose to use civilian maids.

“The heads of the Knights and the Royal Family as well as the boy who is a guest from Japan’s Academy City have arrived in the palace. The audience will be held soon. Lady Villain, please prepare yourself.”

“…Understood,” she responded, but there were no preparations she had to make. Even in her private room, Villian remained dressed at the minimum needed for an official appearance. Her life was constantly filled with a certain type of tension.

She walked across the large room, opened the door, and exited. A woman wearing a green maid uniform was standing so as not to get in Villian’s path. The maid nodded in her direction and Villian started walking down the hallway. But then she suddenly stopped and looked up.

The ceiling of the long, long straight hallway was very tall. Much like the lights in a tunnel, shield-shaped crests were lined up on the walls at even intervals.

They were the crests of knights throughout history.

There was a similar hallway in the Royal Family’s secondary residence, Windsor Castle, but the one in Buckingham Palace held the meaning of a magical faction, so only the crests of knights were displayed. Having one’s family’s crest displayed in that hallway was the first step towards becoming a noble family and it was what everyone who wielded a sword for England wished for.

Perhaps because the crests had been developed so they would be easily distinguishable on the battlefield, each one was extremely distinct. It was to the point that it almost ruined the harmony of the hallway. But there was something else that ruined the hallway’s harmony even more.

There was an empty space.

Amid the evenly spaced escutcheons, one spot had nothing in it. It gave Villian a strong uncomfortable feeling much like a comb with a missing tooth.

She knew the reason behind the empty space.

A certain man had fought for England and was supposed to have been made a knight in recognition of his valiant actions. The man had still been a mercenary when he had disappeared from the country, but the head of the Knights left that space empty to show his respect for the man.

Seeing that empty space, Villian's lips moved almost on their own.

"…William…"

The maid walking next to her said nothing.

Part 3

The helicopter Kamijou and the others were on landed in a large park in London…or so Kamijou thought. Apparently, it was on the grounds of Buckingham Palace where the Queen of England lived. An entire section of England's capital city was left open as a combination of two adjoining parks, so his mistake wasn't too surprising.

Normally, Kamijou would have raised his voice in admiration at the scale of it all, but something else had his attention.

"Touma….fooooooooooooooooooooooooddddddddddd!!"

"Hgyaaaahhhhh!? This isn't just a bite!! I think you've started chewing, Index-saaaaaaaaannnnnn!!"

The silver-haired green-eyed monster (she had finished changing into her nun's habit on the helicopter) had climbed up on his back and was declaring her intentions in a dreadful way. Watching the two of them from the corner of her eye, Kanzaki Kaori stepped down from the helicopter ahead of them.

"I screwed up. We took longer to arrive than scheduled because we were flying into the wind. We need to hurry. Everyone will already have gathered."

"Hey!! How can you say that while this tragedy is unfolding before your eyes!? Surely, you can at least get her a sandwich!! I think she's so hungry she's about to turn into a completely different creature!!"

"Hee hee. Managing Index Librorum Prohibitorum is your duty. I'm relieved to see how flawlessly you are handling it."

"You *are* mad, aren't you!? You're mad about the whole Fallen Angel Ero Maid thing, aren't you!? But you're the one who came bursting into the hospital room dressed like tha-gggghhhhghgh!!"

Kamijou's words became suddenly garbled because Kanzaki had covered his mouth with her hand.

"(…You must not mention that in front of the pilot or anyone else. Do you understand?)"

"Mggghghg-Your Saint's-ggghhghghh-your Saint's strength is-ghgghgggghhh-crushing-ghghghgggghhh!?"

Still crushing his face, Kanzaki dragged Kamijou along and they moved from the square rest area that had guide lights so it could be used as a heliport to Buckingham Palace. Since Index was still clinging to Kamijou's back, they must have looked like an odd group.

Kanzaki did not lead them to the large main gate, but to a small back entrance.

However, Kamijou opened his mouth to speak just before she grabbed the doorknob.

"Wait a second, Kanzaki!!"

“Why are you speaking while your head is being held like a volleyball?”

“I don’t want to hear that from the person doing the grabbing! Anyway, is it really okay for me to go in the palace!? My right hand contains the power of Imagine Breaker, so I’m not going to destroy all the national treasures the second I set foot inside and have to spend a lifetime of misfortune trying to pay back my debt, am I!?”

“…Oh, that’s what you’re worried about?” Kanzaki finally let go of Kamijou’s face. “You don’t need to worry about that. England may be the country magic was developed in, but all of those kinds of security measures have been removed from Buckingham Palace.”

“Eh? Really? The Queen lives here, so I was sure it would be a ridiculously strong magical fortress.”

“Strongholds like that do exist. Windsor Castle, the secondary residence of the Royal Family, is a good example.” Kanzaki sighed slightly as she spoke. “Buckingham Palace is used for meetings with important people from other countries. If it was covered in magical mechanisms, it would look as if they were inviting the foreign leaders into a trap. That would be a major diplomatic problem. Public parties are held in Windsor Castle, but only those who trust the queen regnant enough to not lead them into a trap are invited to those. There are types of danger other than physical danger.”

She then glanced away from Kamijou who still had Index connected to his head.

“Also…”

“?”

“The Queen doesn’t need that kind of security.”

Speaking those significant-sounding words, Kanzaki opened the back door.

The door itself was small, but the scenery beyond it was quite something. The sheer scale of it was clear by the fact that the inside of a room could be referred to as “scenery”.

When Kamijou had heard it referred to as a “palace”, he had been imagining a

world of sparkling gold, but that was not what actually lay before him. The hallway was as wide as a small room. Inside the hallway were carpets meant to be looked at instead of stepped on, paintings and sculptures scattered around, and even a maid carrying around a tea set.

“There you are.”

While Kamijou was being overwhelmed by the scenery and the maid, a man’s voice reached his ears. The man spoke in Japanese and was wearing a suit. However, this was not the kind of worn-out suit someone in a packed train would be wearing; it was a suit one wore to display one’s status at a party. Frankly, it was the kind of suit that would most likely never be a part of Kamijou’s life.

Seeing the man, Kanzaki opened her mouth to speak.

“Knight Leader, many thanks for supplying our means of transportation.”

“If you mean the helicopter, think nothing of it. It was a necessary expense.” The blond man Kanzaki had called Knight Leader turned his gaze in Kamijou’s direction. “So you are the one carrying the duty of being Index Librorum Prohibitorum’s manager.”

“E-eh? This whole manager thing is really pretty vague…”

“I had been curious as to what kind of person was maintaining those 103,000 grimoires, but I never expected he would do so with her attached to his head. The mystic secrets of the Orient truly are a sight to behold.”

“I knew this was wasn’t right! The only reason we’re in this odd situation is that she lost to her hunger!! If you don’t mind, could you at least get her some bread to eat before she actually breaks through my skull!?”

A warning glare from Kanzaki told him he was acting improperly, but Knight Leader used a hand to call over the maid carrying a tea set. Kamijou and Index received scones from the maid. They were sort of like a mix between bread and cookies.

“Hm…Nnn!? What’s this!? I-it’s spreading! This scone feels like its spreading throughout my stomach filling it up bit by bit!”

“I see. That’s good. Now, everyone is already gathered, so if you would come this way.”

“Eh? It’s free? This is free!? In that case, we’re not holding back. Index! Eat as much as you want!!”

“I was never planning on holding back!! Scones!! Scones!!”

“That’s right, Index!! Keep at it!! Let’s eat them all!!”

“…Excuse me, but the situation is developing even now, so we need to hurry and…”

“Oh, they level up even further when you put butter on them!!”

“Blueberries work, too!!”

“But eating them plain is great, too!! That way you can enjoy their natural flavor!!”

“Okay, then all the butter, blueberries, strawberry jam, and honey are mine!!”

“That’s not what I meant, you stupid nun!!”

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

“Wa ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

“So good!! Ah ha! So good!!”

Knight Leader was left speechless for a while until he finally cast his eyes down and muttered to Kanzaki.

“…Do you mind if I draw my sword?”

“If you’re trying to persuade them, let me do it!! Don’t worry. I’ll do something!!”

Kanzaki then punched Kamijou and held Index’s hands behind her back. The maid hurriedly left and the scone heaven was over.

Part 4

“So why exactly were we called here?” Kamijou suddenly asked as they walked down a large hallway in Buckingham Palace.

“Did Tsuchimikado not tell you anything as your guide in Academy City?” Kanzaki asked sounding a bit flustered.

Kamijou shook his head.

“No. He just gassed us out of nowhere and left us at the airport.”

“That bastard…”

Kanzaki closed her eyes and gritted her teeth, but Kamijou didn’t seem as worried about it.

(Isn’t he always like that? He did kick me out into the air with a parachute over Avignon.)

Knight Leader opened his mouth to speak after listening to their conversation from the side.

“Something like a strategy meeting is about to be held. Members of the Royal Family, the knights, and the church have gathered here for it. However, the top members of the Royal Family – that is, those who have royal blood – are present, so it is officially an ‘audience’.”

Having said that, Knight Leader glanced over to check what Kamijou was wearing.

“As such, it would be best if you were dressed more formally, but I suppose

nothing can be done about it at this point. And they aren't the type to get angry at you for wearing a T-shirt and casual trousers."

Kamijou gave a slight start at being pointed out like that.

Kamijou started panicking at the thought that he had made some extremely basic faux pas, but then he saw Kanzaki walking next to him with her bare leg and navel.

"With Kanzaki like that, I guess there shouldn't be any problem with me…"

"That is a rather rude assessment. My clothing is accepted as a means of configuring my spells."

There was a bit of anger hidden behind Kanzaki's words and she made a slight attempt to keep her body out of Kamijou's gaze. That was when Index spoke up.

"You said this was a strategy meeting, but what are we making a strategy for?"

"It was the Queen's decision to officially summon you, but that shows just how serious the situation is."

Knight Leader stopped in front of a certain door.

It was an impressive set of double doors that was large even for the huge palace.

"You may have seen it on the news, but the Eurotunnel connecting England and France was bombed by someone. All three tunnels were hit. The destruction of that undersea tunnel has delayed the transport of personnel and goods which has had a major impact on our economy."

"???"

"In short, it is possible magic was used in the bombing. That makes it a magic attack on a national level."

As he spoke, Knight Leader reached for the knob of the large door.

When Kamijou thought about the fact that a room where an audience with the Queen of England and a strategy meeting awaited him, a natural anxiety ran

along his spine. He was being treated as Index Librorum Prohibitorum's protector, so he probably wasn't expected to say much, but he was still going to be present at a meeting that would guide an entire country.

He gulped.

Knight Leader turned the knob.

But before he could fully open the door, a voice came through the gap.

"Gwohhh… This dress is a pain in the ass. Couldn't I just wear a track suit?"

Knight Leader suddenly froze.

Not knowing English, Kamijou merely looked at him quizzically.

"…Excuse me a moment," Knight Leader said quietly and then slipped through the cracked door.

"Ngh!? At least knock before you come in!!"

"I apologize for that, but I need to have a word with you. …Were you really thinking of wearing a track suit to an official appearance? You idiot!!"

"Yay, Knight Leader's the first in!"

"The order we enter the room does not matter!! Please, just act like a queen!! No, that isn't necessary. No one is expecting you to have some surprising character, so please don't bring out an electric guitar!!"

Kamijou heard sounds of a commotion and stared at the door suspiciously, but Kanzaki wasn't translating the conversation into Japanese for some reason and Index just looked sleepy because she had just eaten.

Eventually, Knight Leader stuck his head out through the crack in the door.

"…Sorry for the trouble. Everything is in order now. Queen Elizard has had her eyes opened."

"?"

Kamijou didn’t really understand what he meant, but he entered through the door anyway.

The room did not contain a large throne on a stage with stairs leading to it as was often seen in RPGs. The spacious area looked more like a party hall. A number of tables were set up in concentric circles like the rings of a tree. It reminded Kamijou of the UN conference room he had occasionally seen on TV.

And in the center was the Queen of England. He was pretty sure she had been called Elizard. She was around 50 years old. Her skin and hair were beginning to show the shadows of age, but in some more fundamental way – perhaps you could call it her core or her frame – she outdid even a teenager like Kamijou.

She was wearing a long dress that covered even the tips of her toes. The dress was colored white and black and it looked expensive enough that Kamijou would have to spend the rest of his life paying for the cleaning costs if he got gum on it or something.

The other point of interest was Queen Elizard’s right hand.

She held a sword in it. It looked like a stereotypical double-sided Western sword that was about 80 cm long if the hilt was included. However, it had no tip and no blade. What looked like a long square board was attached to the hilt.

The queen looked like a model English lady and yet she was walking around with that sword out not even putting it in a sheath.

Seeing that sword brought an initial impression of the queen to Kamijou’s mind.

And Kamijou then spoke his impression out loud.

“What a surprising character…!? H-Himegami tried so hard and failed to gain some individuality and she’s acquired it so easily!!”

“No, that is normal! The electric guitar, the soccer ball, the cup-and-ball game, the surfboard, and all the other unneeded tools have been taken away!! You may not be familiar with it, but that sword is the symbol of Queen Regnant Elizard!!”

Knight Leader was holding his head in his hands as if he were recalling a nightmare.

In contrast, the queen gave a broad smile.

“This is a sword exclusive to the Royal Family known as the Curtana.”

“Curtana?” Kamijou repeated questioningly, but Knight Leader spoke before the queen could continue.

“It is a sacred sword that is passed down generation by generation to each head of state. Following that sword’s history would be the same as understanding the history of the British Royal Family.”

“You are making too much of it. I admit that it is a useful tool, but the Royal Family would not be destroyed if it were to be broken,” denied Elizard ostentatiously with a smile on her face.

The familiar way the queen spoke of the sword showed just how used she was to carrying the Curtana.

She looked back towards Kamijou and continued speaking of the Curtana.

“The Curtana is a ceremonial sword used in the coronation of the king or queen. It is not the sign of being the queen, but the proof of being the person who chooses the ruler. As you can see, it has no blade and its tip is flat, so there is no danger in letting it hang down.”

“It may look odd to you, but it would be helpful if you could get over such cultural differences,” added Knight Leader.

As neither a knight nor a samurai, Kamijou didn’t understand the point of a sword without a blade.

“(…Is that really such an amazing sword,)” he whispered to Kanzaki.

“Well, yes,” she nodded. “It’s only artificial, but it provides the bearer with the same type of power as Michael. It is a sword that lets you freely control the power of not just an archangel, but the leader of the angels. It can hardly be called a normal sword.”

“The leader of the angels…?”

Kamijou stiffened at those dangerous sounding words and Index drowsily spoke.

“That refers to the most powerful of the angels.”

“…”

The term angel alone brought bad memories to Kamijou’s mind, but now they were talking about the strongest one.

He looked back in Elizard’s direction and she rested the Curtana on her shoulder.

“However, it can only be used within the boundaries of the United Kingdom. Basically, the Curtana is a sword that provides a large amount of Telesma to the queen and the knights,” she explained bluntly. “Basically, there is a special rule that only take affect within the four cultures of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the three factions of the Royal Family, the knights, and the Anglican Church exist to enforce that rule. The Curtana functions as a sword that provides great power to those who enforce that rule and protect the United Kingdom.”

“A special rule…?” Kamijou asked and Knight Leader continued the explanation in Elizard’s place.

“The Anglican Church is a Christian Church original to this country. Henry VIII, a king in the 1500’s, created it because he hated having other countries interfering with the governing of his own country. In order to get rid of all external influence, he made sure of two points when he created it. The first was that the country would never be violated by foreign influences and the second was that the King of England would be at the top of the Anglican Church and that the king did not have to listen to what the Roman Catholic Pope said.”

“Henry VIII established the position of the king as the leader of the angels because it was a position higher than that of the Roman Pope. He would then lead the people of England with his knights as an army of angels. Thanks to this, the queen regnant can even now possess the same type of power as Michael, the leader of the angels, so long as she holds the Curtana and is within the country,” said Elizard as she swung the Curtana down from her shoulder.

The queen spun the bladeless sword around like a baton and Knight Leader continued the explanation.

“In the 1500’s, Henry VIII used the four countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to create this mechanism. Four is a number that indicates the earth. It seems he wanted to create a magical meaning that only held true within an ‘all-English land’ by constructing a map made up of a meaningful number of countries. He created a great land that glorified being very independent and received no influence from the many areas of power the Roman Catholic Pope held at the time. It is possible that he was troubled by the complicated politics of the surrounding countries, and he wished for the legendary land spoken of in old stories.”

The reason had been political, not religious.

By preparing an “all-English land” created of the 4 nations making up the United Kingdom, he had made the king the leader of the angels and the knights into an army of angels.

It couldn’t have been done with only one country. A symbol of multiple nations had been necessary for the “all-English land” to receive that blessing. And since it was also politically all under the control one large country, it all was exceedingly beneficial from a political standpoint.

That was the United Kingdom.

And the ruler standing at the top of the kingdom could use that power to its fullest.

That was the queen.

“(…Be that as it may, I can’t get as flashy as what was detected during Angel Fall. I may have power, but I’m still human. Using angel-level spells isn’t that easy.)”

“Hah?”

“Nothing. But Henry VIII didn’t have it quite that easy. He wanted to use the four countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to construct the rule that would make him the leader of the angels, but Scotland was an independent nation at the time and was actually at war with England. He had assumed Scotland would be easily conquered when he came up with the rule, but it turned out to be a formidable opponent. For a while, it started to look like his rule was

in danger of failing."

Apparently, there was also a problem in that it could only be used within the 4 countries, so he couldn't use the power of the leader of the angels while in colonies outside the UK.

"Incidentally, part of Ireland is currently regarded as independent, so that area is not used in the symbol of the 4 nations. Keeping Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom was necessary in order to maintain the four country structure," Elizard said as she spun the Curtana around. "By setting up that rule, the Curtana leveled up from being the sword that decided who the King of England would be to the sword that determined who England's leader of the angels was. … Although, the sword only has an effect on royalty and nobles, so it is a tad unfair to the common people."

Then Kanzaki cut in from the side.

"Members of the Anglican Church such as myself are not affected by the power of the angels. We are treated as those who use the power of the Christian Church as humans like usual, so we do not receive the blessing of the Curtana. Just think of the Curtana as giving a large amount of power to the queen and to the knights."

"The United Kingdom is a land made up of 4 cultures and is protected by 3 organizations. The Curtana is used as a little tool to construct the relationship between those 3 organizations."

As usual, the queen was the only one that spoke lightly about the Curtana.

It wasn't that she didn't understand its importance. She just had enough power to spare that she could laugh off tradition.

"Okay, that's the end of the Curtana lecture. Do you understand a bit more about this small tool from England's history now?"

"So the reason Buckingham Palace doesn't need security is…?" Kamijou asked timidly and the queen responded lightly.

"Do you know of any human that could kill the leader of the angels? I've never see one, at any rate."

Kamijou didn’t fully understand, but he had gathered that it was used in some ridiculous ceremony, so he decided he should make sure not to accidentally touch it with his right hand. He put his caution at its maximum level. A sword used in a ritual that chose the king or queen sounded like a national treasure to him and he knew it would be very, very bad if something did happen.

Queen Elizard saw Kamijou drawing back from the sword and gave an unconcerned smile.

“Even if you did damage or destroy it in some way, no one would blame you. After all, this is historically the Curtana Second.”

“Just the name doesn’t really tell me anything…”

“That means it’s the second one. Historically, the Curtana Original disappeared somewhere. This Curtana Second was hurriedly created so there wouldn’t be any hindrances to the ceremony. So even if this one was broken, a new Curtana could be made. You don’t need to worry too much.”

“Really…?” Kamijou said with a questioning look on his face and a voice spoke up from behind him.

“That isn’t true at all. It’s true that the Curtana Second is a second sword that was artificially created by the Royal Family, but the method to do so has been lost. A third or fourth sword cannot be created so easily.”

The voice was coming from the doorway.

A beautiful woman that looked to be in her early 30’s entered dressed in a dress just as luxurious as the queen’s. Her dress was mostly blue, but her skirt did not spread out. Instead, it stuck with the lines of her legs. She had a monocle over her left eye which increased her intellectual – or rather, cool-headed – appearance. Her black hair reached her shoulders. The hair was unnaturally glossy, so it may have been dyed.

Her outfit was luxurious but not gaudy. She left one with an odd but graceful impression.

“(…That’s the first princess, Rimea,)” Kanzaki whispered in his ear.

Knight Leader seemed shocked that the princess had arrived without being accompanied by an aide or even a single maid.

“If you had asked, one of my men…no, I would have gone myself to get you.”

“Oh, no, no. I can’t have others accompanying me. That just adds to the risk of being stabbed in the back. I have no intention of putting my trust in those who know me.”

“…”

It looked like Knight Leader was going to get upset over that, but he instead gave a sigh of exasperation. It seemed Princess Rimea’s distrust wasn’t unusual.

“I see you’re still as gloomy as ever, sister.”

This time, a woman in a red dress entered the room. Unlike the other two women’s dresses, this one was made up of bright red leather, so it was reminiscent about something bondage related. The woman wearing the red dress looked to be in her upper 20’s. She had two knights accompanying her, one on either side.

In contrast to Rimea, she was a very gaudy woman.

Her skirt did not spread out, but it appeared to be supported by a wire framework. As she passed through the door, the skirt made a noise and expanded to an unnaturally large size like an umbrella.

“Why must you always be so depressing, sister? If you truly cannot trust anyone, why don’t you just get it over with and die?”

(Sister?)

Kamijou looked on in confusion and the woman in the red dress glanced over at him.

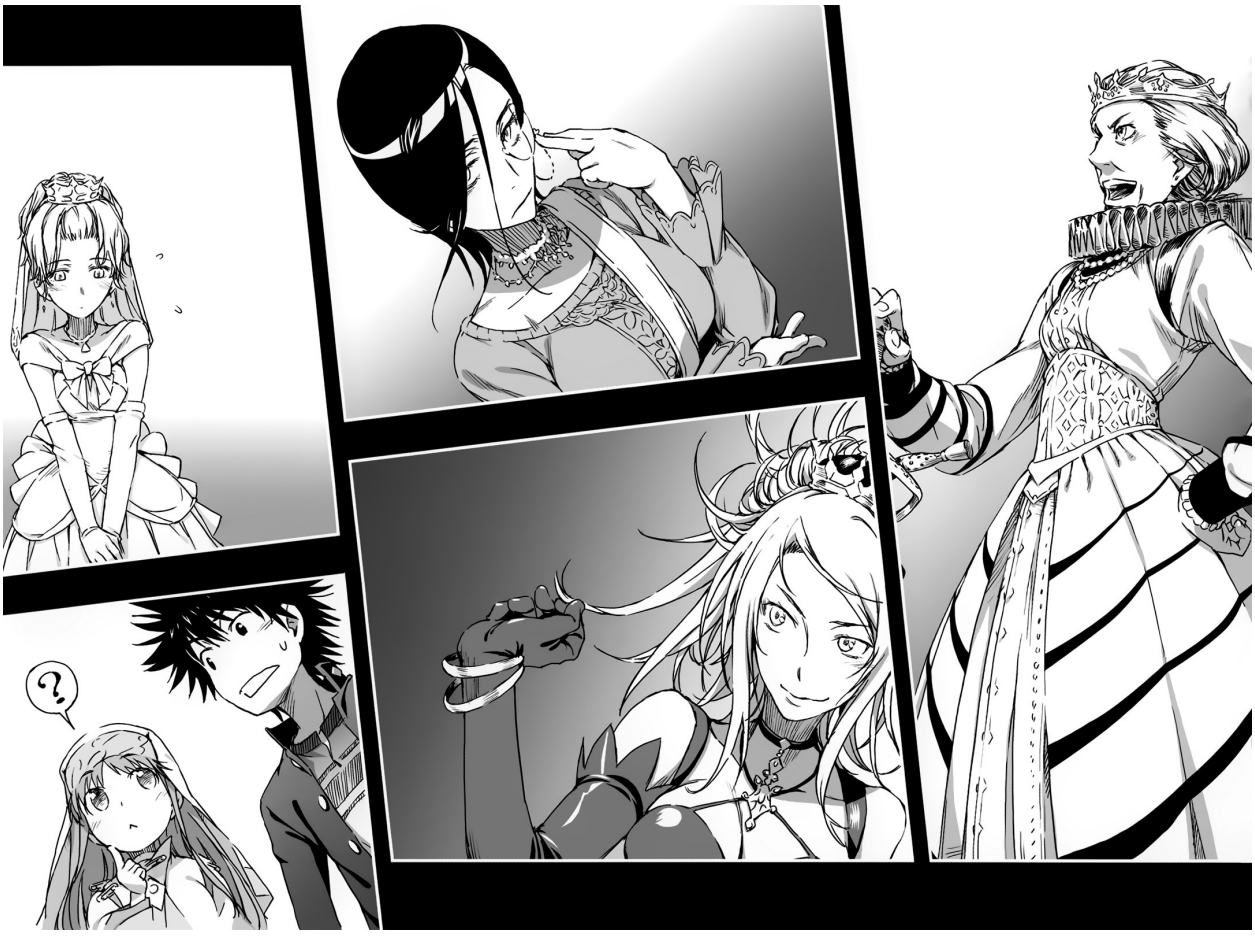
“I am the second princess, Carissa. Have you at least been taught your history, boy?”

Kamijou was shocked by the scale of someone whose name was in the history

books just by being born. On the other hand, Carissa didn’t seem interested in Kamijou.

“Oh, so you came too, Villian.”

A woman in a green dress who had appeared in a corner of the room at some point gave a start at those sudden words. With her long blonde hair, her white skin, and her dress with a spread out skirt, she was the kind of stereotypical princess one would expect to see in a picture book. However, it seemed she didn’t like to stand out too much. While shrinking down and holding down her skirt with both hands, the woman who had been called Villian silently nodded and hurriedly moved away.



“She is my younger sister, the third princess. Boring, isn’t she?” Carissa said calmly.

Her difficult to comment on words had surely reached Villian, but the third

princess only shrunk down further.

After seeing that the three princesses had entered the room, Queen Elizard spoke.

“It looks like everyone’s here.”

Those words must have indicated the beginning of the strategy meeting that was being called an audience. Most likely, a large number of soldiers and magicians would enter. From the number of seats prepared, it looked like the meeting would have more than 100 people in it.

(…I feel so out-of-place here.)

As Kamijou was giving a bitter laugh in his heart, the queen continued speaking.

“So let’s get out of here.”

“……”

Kamijou looked over to Index, but she was still just looking blankly ahead. When he looked at Kanzaki’s face, he saw she was giving a sigh of exasperation. Knight Leader averted his gaze with a bitter look on his face when Kamijou turned his questioning look in his direction.

Amid it all, Elizard spoke with a smile on her face.

“In a large meeting where everything said is recorded, a lot of people can’t say what they want to say. In a situation like this where every second counts, having people argue is just a waste of time. At times, making a decision quickly with a small number of people is more effective.”

“…In Your Majesty’s case, I feel there are too many of those cases,” murmured Knight Leader.

Kamijou was taken aback and looked around the conference room.

“But…um…Is that really okay? Doing it with just a few people is fine, but won’t the others feel bad about being left out?”

“Oh, that’s simple enough to deal with. We just tell them that they are free to butt in, but, if we go with their policy and fail, all of the responsibility lies with them.”

“…Wahh.”

“Those people acting like specialists love to give their opinions, but very few of them are willing to take responsibility for those opinions. And having people like that complicating things can be a problem. Especially when we’re trying to lead a nation.”

Second Princess Carissa nodded at Queen Elizard’s words.

“As long as we have a representative from the Royal Family, the knights, and the church, I don’t mind. I don’t like that the head of the Anglican Church, the one who summoned Index Librorum Prohibitorum, isn’t here, but I suppose it’s fine since we have a Saint here in her place.”

“I-I’m very sorry. It seems our Archbishop is acting secretly behind the scenes as usual,” said Kanzaki as she lowered her head.

Kamijou started thinking.

The knights had Knight Leader, the Anglican Church had Kanzaki Kaori, but the Royal Family had the queen and all three princesses. There appeared to be a bias in who was invited.

“Hee hee hee. For better or for worse, this country is, in the end, a kingdom. … That is, the land of a king or, in this case, a queen,” First Princess Rimea said while looking at Kamijou’s face.

Apparently, the Royal Family had the most weight when it came to decisions on the national level. As Kamijou was thinking that, Third Princess Villian silently lowered her head apologetically for some reason.

On the other hand, Carissa pointed towards Kamijou and spoke.

“By the way, the representatives of the three factions are fine, but what’s that boy’s role? If he’s going to be in the meeting, I’d like to know what his position is.”

It sounded like she was saying that she would rather he be left out if he wasn't needed, but the queen smiled.

"He is the brave boy who saved the lives of our people and protected our national interests in his unpaid efforts to eliminate the French terrorists who attempted to hijack a passenger plane. In recognition of his achievement and experience, I am willing to listen to his opinion."

"Hmm. I see. So that's what you're going with." For some reason the second princess smiled and she moved her face closer to Kamijou's. "So you are brave. Then it won't be a problem. That is an excellent word."

Kamijou felt like drawing back, but Queen Elizard brought the discussion to a close.

"Now then, let's get this meeting started. If we waste any more time, it will take all meaning out of running off."

Part 5

The queen, Kamijou, and the others used a staircase to climb up from the 1st floor to the 3rd floor, walked around a bend in a large hallway, and gathered in a simple reception area. As they all sat down on sofas and got comfortable, a maid passed by and looked surprised to see them there.

Kamijou quickly looked around at the faces of everyone there.

The Queen of England, the three princesses, and the head of the knights were all people that sounded like they were from a picture book. Even with the people Kamijou knew, Index and Kanzaki, one was the Index Librorum Prohibitorum who had 103,000 grimoires precisely memorized and the other was one the

world’s fewer than 20 Saints. That group of people made him doubt for a second that he was really in a 21st century society.

(Honestly, could I *be* more out of place…?)

Kamijou was feeling uncomfortable, so he stood up from the sofa and pulled his cell phone from his pocket out of habit. He was just planning on checking the time, but he remembered the phone had a small lens on it.

It had a camera.

“(…Hmm. With the queen and the princesses here, it kinda makes me want to get a picture of them, but using a cell phone in such a fancy palace just seems wrong.)”

After mumbling that, he started to close his cell phone.

But the next thing he knew, Second Princess Carissa was much closer to him than she had been when she spoke to him before. Previously, she had just been facing him, but now she was standing right next to him with her bare shoulder almost touching him. She was tilting her head in Kamijou’s direction looking at his cell phone’s screen. It was much like when someone on a train started looking at the magazine the person sitting next to them was reading.

He wasn’t reading an email or anything, but Kamijou still hid the screen from view.

“…The screen has a film on it so you can’t see it from the side.”

“You fool. A princess wouldn’t secretly do something like that. I thought you wanted to take a picture.”

With a puzzled look on his face, Kamijou held the phone in one hand and spun his head back around. He saw that Carissa had tilted her body in front of the camera and was pulling her chin back slightly to make the softest expression he had seen on her face up to that point.

Kamijou drew back a bit.

“…Hey, did you practice that face for photos?”

“What are you saying? This is just the basis. Unlike when addressing the general public, you can retake this as much as necessary, so I can easily maintain my majesty by just going with the best one. I’d say that’s plenty fair since we don’t have any special lights or makeup like they use for sample photos of food.”

Carissa gave her rebuttal with her face frozen in its photo-taking expression.

He got the feeling she was urging him to hurry up and take the photo, and from the fact that she was making that expression, he decided she didn’t have a problem with having a camera pointed at her.

He had a feeling Carissa would stay like that forever if he didn’t take a photo, so he switched the phone into camera mode and held his arm out.

“But, um…Is this really okay? I’m not making some kind of ignorant mistake by using a cell phone camera to take a photo of a princess, am I?”

“It’s true that most people don’t use cell phone cameras, but wanting to leave behind as lovely a face as possible is something of a conditioned reflex. …And just so you know, this isn’t just a bad habit of mine. Look, my sister has noticed the camera and is headed this way.”

“Wah!?”

The next thing Kamijou knew, First Princess Rimea was standing on the opposite side of him from Carissa. She spoke with her eyes on the cell phone screen.

“…Oh, dear. You have a nice shot of my little sister, but I’m not fully in frame. I won’t allow that. Let’s see…like this, no, more like this. If I get closer…and that should do it…”

Fitting three people on the small screen was a difficult task, but Rimea forced her body up next to Kamijou to fit in the frame. This caused various soft portions of her body to be pressed up against Kamijou’s arm.

“(…Gwah!? What? How did this situation spring up so suddenly!?)”

“(..Hm? I don’t mind, but we should probably hide this because Knight Leader can be rather hard-headed and he might draw his sword if he noticed.)”

“…!!!???”

An extremely stiff smile appeared on Kamijou’s face.

“…”

A third figure was now standing behind him having arrived so silently he hadn’t noticed. Third Princess Villian was silently working her way into the frame.

(Wait a second. Unlike the other two, I had taken her as a proper graceful princess!!)

“Oh. As I thought, when it comes to taking photos, you’re actually willing to take the initiative.”

“…I…wasn’t really…” she mumbled in response to her sister’s words, but she maintained the kind of cool expression one used for an ID photo.

Kamijou started wondering what was going on in the British Royal Family and he decided to just take a picture to end it.

But there was one person who stopped him.

It was Queen Elizard.

“…Really, where do you people think you are?”

The queen spun around the Curtana Second’s flat tip and pushed it to the floor and then gave a sigh of exasperation. Seeing that, Knight Leader (who didn’t notice that the first princess’s breasts were pressed up against Kamijou’s arm) and Kanzaki Kaori nodded in agreement. It was as if they were saying, “That’s right, that’s right.”

But then Elizard continued speaking.

“This is the United Kingdom, the nation of the queen. Why are you taking pictures leaving out the leading part!?”

“Ahh, you fool!! Don’t show off your unrestrained love of festivities in front of someone from another country!! This is a strategy meeting!!”

The queen had started to dash towards Kamijou and the princesses, but Knight Leader tore at his hair with both hands and then stopped her with a full-force tackle. Seeing the two of them fall to the ground, Kamijou's face paled, but the second princess tugged on his elbow. The look in her eyes was telling him to ignore the idiots and just take the photo.

A slight electronic noise sounded as he took the picture and Elizard looked up from the floor with a look of despair on her face.

"Ah! You took it!! You really took it without me!! You can redo it! How about you take another one with me in it!?"

The queen swung Curtana Second as she shouted, but the three princesses walked back to their spots on the sofas with expressions saying they had done what they were there to do.

Elizard lay on the floor stricken with various emotions, but she must have finally remembered why they were there. She got to her hurt feet shakily.

"W-we are here to discuss France."

Kamijou assumed she was taking him into consideration and the others had mastered Japanese, because that was the language she was speaking.

"What about France?" asked First Princess Rimea with a number of magazines all open to horoscopes and other forms of divination.

"Yes, I suppose I should explain everything in order. The problem started 5 days ago with the Eurotunnel explosion," the queen said nodding slightly in response to her daughter's words. "That sole land route between England and France has three separate tunnels, but all three of them were blown up. I have determined that it was done by the French government."

"…Do you have any *proof* of that?" asked Carissa.

However, she was not saying it because she doubted it. She had a dangerous look on her face that made it clear she wanted to be able to just start a war and physically deal with the problem.

The queen shook her head.

“That is why Index Librorum Prohibitorum was summoned. If a French-type of Roman Catholic spell was used, she should be able to analyze it using the 103,000 grimoires.”

Index looked on blankly while Elizard brought the focus to her.

The queen lightly tapped her own temple with her index finger.

“As long as we can gather some evidence, we can take action. It may be none of my business, but France has its own complicated decision-making process it has to go through. There is a group there that hates the Roman Catholic Church’s one-way interference in France’s business. If we can contact the people that want this to end peacefully, it is possible this could all be resolved through talks. …Of course, that plan comes from the wishful thinkers here in England and it’s really nothing more than a nice thought that has little chance of succeeding.”

“If this is about France…” Kamijou timidly said with a frown. He wasn’t really sure if he should be speaking up at such an important meeting. “Then does this have to do with the plane hijacking earlier today? I’m pretty sure they were French.”

“That likely had nothing to do with this,” Elizard said while looking at Kamijou. “At the very least, I don’t think the government was involved. However, I cannot deny the possibility that they knew it was going to happen and let the terrorists do it.” She sighed. “According to the police, they received aid from multiple organizations in exchange for teaching those organizations how to hijack a plane without using guns. However, we do not know if those multiple terrorist organizations actually exist. The French government is asking us to hand over the terrorists because they wish to punish criminals from their country themselves. It certainly does seem suspicious.”

She spoke of a certain level of suspicious, but did not follow it too deeply.

She was not the type of person to pointlessly keep at a problem when there wasn’t enough information to come to a proper conclusion.

“The Sky Bus 365 is the primary model used in air shipping to the United Kingdom and the weakness this hijacking pointed out makes them unusable. And all the other models of passenger planes are being inspected to ensure that they are safe. At normal times, that would be an acceptable loss, but with the

land route cut off, it is a terrible loss."

"If they cut off the sea route, we'll be completely isolated," said First Princess Rimea in a bored voice as she read the various magazine divinations for some reason.

She was looking at standard horoscopes, blood type horoscopes, tarot, and kigaku (The last one had kanji that Kamijou didn't even know how to read).

"For example, what if they used airplanes to scatter mines throughout the sea around the UK? If just one was hit, it would make the private companies think twice even about going in areas of the sea that weren't known to have been mined."

"…Your thoughts are as cunning as ever," muttered Carissa in a provoking way.

Either Rimea took it as a compliment or one of the bits of divination in a magazine had said she would have good luck, because she smiled before speaking some more.

"But even if we dealt with France, it isn't clear if that would truly solve the issue. We're looking for a French-type of Roman Catholic spell. This time the attack was carried out by France, but 'they' are surely behind it. It would be best not to think of this as a dispute between England and France, but as antagonism between the England/Academy City side and the Rome/Russia side. We mustn't be satisfied with having taken out just the vanguard. If we use up all our strength on that, we won't last afterwards."

Knight Leader seemed to agree with her.

"Now that the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church have joined forces, most of the nations affiliated with the EU and even most that are not, are being supported by the Rome/Russia alliance. Currently, the United Kingdom is on its own. There is a good chance that other countries are part of the vanguard along with France."

"And that is not the only problem," said Elizard and everyone focused on her. "In the confusion of the previous hijacking, there was one thing that caught my attention."

“Something that caught your attention…?” muttered Kamijou without thinking.

The queen nodded in response.

“That incident was resolved with the help of the Anglican Church’s Necessarius. They used a type of illusion to alter the display of the fuel gauge in the cockpit. If it had succeeded, it would have appeared that the amount of fuel was rapidly decreasing, the pilots would have mistaken it for a fuel leak, and they would have been forced to perform an emergency landing on a highway. The knights would have been waiting for the plane and would have used Robin Hood to quickly shoot straight through the wall of the plane in order to hit the terrorists.”

“But…when did that happen?”

Kamijou had been putting forth great effort aboard that plane and he didn’t recall anything like that happening.

“It didn’t. It ended in a failure because *someone interfered with the illusion from a distance*,” responded Queen Elizard.

She took some documents from Knight Leader and lightly threw them on the table in front of her. The numerous reports spread out like a fan and stopped right in front of Index.

“It’s still under investigation, but do your 103,000 grimoires agree?”

Index looked down at the reports for a quick moment.

The grimoire library Index Librorum Prohibitorum showed no signs of worry.

“It was a Norse spell,” responded Index smoothly with no hesitation. “Seiðr magic is used primarily by female Norse magicians. It uses a certain type of song to cause one to see an illusion while it is used, but it also has a spell that can be used to remove its ‘intoxication’. This works with both illusions that trick the brain and illusions that directly cause an image to appear.”

“I see,” nodded Elizard.

Rimea seemed to be done with the divination pages and she was folding in the corner of a page about an effective type of massage.

“If someone created interference, he – well, I suppose this is most likely a she – must be a magician,” she commented.

Carissa frowned at that.

“But didn’t they say the terrorists in the hijacking didn’t have anyone like that in their group?”

“The problem is that the interference came from the direction of Scotland,” the queen responded bitterly.

Carissa’s expression twisted sadistically.

“So the enemies aren’t just on the outside.”

“Depending on whether a French magician has made it inside the country or a British magician has betrayed us, and how we deal with this changes, don’t you think?” Rimea said with a smile as she threw one magazine to the side and grabbed another.

But Elizard shook her head.

“No. This magician has only interfered with an illusion of ours once. If this magician had truly wished for the terrorist attack to succeed, he or she would have seen it through to the end. The magician could have shot down the plane from the ground after the hijacking had been dealt with.”

That idea sent a chill down Kamijou’s spine.

“Think of it like this: If this magician is skilled enough to interfere with an illusion from a distance, she is very likely able to use those skills to attack. And yet the magician did nothing more. This brings forward the possibility that the magician was not attempting to aid the terrorists.”

“What reason could this magician have had to interfere with the illusion other than helping them?” asked Carissa.

“For our plan, a runway had to be prepared so the passenger plane could make its emergency landing. This was to be done by sealing off a portion of a large highway. If this magician had no interest in the fate of the plane, her aim had to

be preventing that highway from being sealed off."

"…So this magician had some reason she had to pass through that area at that time?" muttered Kamijou.

Elizard gave a bored sigh.

"If this magician interfered with the illusion to achieve her objective knowing that Necessarius was creating the illusion, she would have to be rather stupid. However, it feels like she was willing to make an enemy of the country to carry out whatever her objective is. Of course, that would mean the objective could be something truly dangerous indeed."

"Just the dispute between England and France was enough to make my head hurt and now you're saying there is an independent terrorist within the country?"

The queen nodded in response to Knight Leader's question.

They now had two major problems. England now had to deal with an attack from the outside and one from the inside.

"The highway in question connects Scotland to England and the interference came from Scotland. This leads me to believe that the dangerous magician was heading south from Scotland."

"Just in case, we at the church will investigate the cabals based in Scotland," said Kanzaki. "However, there are quite a few magical groups within the country both large and small that would see this chaos as an opportunity. I cannot guarantee that we can determine which one it is quickly."

"That's fine. Just do as much as you can," responded Elizard.

That was when Third Princess Villian spoke up for the first time and did so even more timidly than even an outsider like Kamijou. Her eyes were downcast and she fidgeted her fingers in front of her chest.

"France, the Roman Catholic Church, and the terrorists are all taking these actions because they want to get a message across. Could we possibly listen to that message and find a non-military way to resolve this?"

“Of course not,” said Second Princess Carissa. “I admit that conversation is important, but talking when it isn’t needed is just a waste of time. And even if they would respond favorably to a conversation, we need to at least get back at them for what they did to us.”

First Princess Rimea nodded as she looked through a special article on methods of face-washing that helped one’s looks.

“I prefer methods that aren’t quite as physical as Carissa’s, but I agree that we need to get through this situation quickly. Oh, don’t worry. There is a way to keep the ill-will between nations to a minimum.”

“…”

It looked like Villian wanted to say something more in response to her sisters, but she remained silent in the end.

Seeing that, the queen finally entered the conversation again.

“In any case, there are two things we must do. First, we need to investigate the cause of the Eurotunnel bombing in order to deal with our external enemy, France. Second, we need to find out what group this inner enemy, the magician, belongs to, find out what he or she is after, and precisely crush the threat if needed.”

“Which enemy has priority?” asked Carissa. “I feel the first is more important. For the sake of military diplomacy, I would like to begin preparing our forces.”

“No.” Elizard shook her head. “This is a decision between investigating an incident that already occurred and stopping one that could occur in the future. We should focus on the magic cabal within the country.”

“Tch,” Carissa clicked her tongue without even trying to hide it, but she didn’t argue the point. The queen then continued.

“Let’s go ahead in the usual way. As it deals with an external enemy, the investigation of the Eurotunnel will be led by the knights and the magic cabal within the United Kingdom will be handled primarily by the Anglican Church. However, Index Librorum Prohibitorum will not go with the church in the search for the magic cabal. She will help with the Eurotunnel investigation.”

The queen plainly laid out the direction everyone would take.

There were no expressions of exaggerated majesty, no attempt to push the reputation of one organization or another, nor was there any of the other unnecessary “ornaments” that those in power tended to add in. She gave only practical instructions about what different people should do.

That method of assignment was the method a true commander used.

“Report what was decided to your respective organizations. Let’s get the inevitable questions over as quickly as possible. After all, there is no kind of rule that makes it so only one incident occurs at a time.”

Part 6

Kanzaki Kaori was holding a cell phone to her ear.

At first glance, it looked like she was having a conversation over the phone, but she wasn’t. The phone was not sending or receiving the information, the dove strap connected to it was. The rubber mascot created a “voice” by vibrating.

“Yes, yes. That’s right. We are investigating the magical groups in Scotland using Edinburgh as a center point, but the main organizational structure here is cabal reserve armies.”

The person speaking was Agnese Sanctis.

The girl used to lead a unit in the Roman Catholic Church, but she and the rest of the unit were now affiliated with the Anglican Church. They were using their greatest weapon, numbers, to investigate the group that had prevented the emergency landing so they could use the highway to head from Scotland to

England.

Kanzaki looked to the side at Kamijou and Index who were listening in and she spoke.

“Cabal reserve armies are not the polished organizations known as magic cabals, right? Aren’t they more a club created from a gathering of novices who are merely interested in magic?”

“Yes, they seem to usually be a gathering of around 3-5 people. We have found one organization with a hundred or so members, but it does nothing more than love fortunes. Most of them do nothing more than mediation and mental exercises, so they disappear naturally without having any effect on others or society as a whole.”

“…People like that are trying to do something that will make an enemy of the country?”

“One characteristic of cabal reserve armies is that there tend to be truly refined and therefore important groups mixed in with the worthless ones. I would say this incident was caused by a collection of golden eggs.”

“So you’ve figured out who it was at least to a certain extent?”

“I’ll give you the details later, but there is evidence that they’ve been carrying out secret activities for quite some time. It seems they had a lot planned out ahead of time, but they hadn’t had a good ‘chance’ to make their move. This information came to the surface as we looked into some retailers of unnatural equipment and reports of seeing suspicious things,” Agnese responded in a natural voice. “We are a unit that battles using our numbers. With this many people to throw at the problem and the authority of the Anglican Church added in, it isn’t hard to get at least some information.”

Agnese then sounded like she was reading from a memo.

“Their group is called New Light. They have the usual structure of a cabal reserve army, but their refinement outdoes all the others. It seems they are only using the cabal reserve army structure to maintain their position. The group has 4 members. I will send you the documents with their names and photographs later.”

“What about their headquarters?”

“We went by there, but we were too late.” Bitterness was mixed in with Agnese’s voice. “However, it was set up to be an excellent environment for creating spiritual items. Also, the place had a Norse smell to it. We found a detailed map of a certain city. It didn’t just have the locations of streets and buildings on it. It also had the locations of the hundreds of thousands of security cameras in the city.”

“Hundreds of thousands of security cameras…? You don’t mean…”

“Yes,” Agnese responded after a short pause. “It was London. It seems they plan on doing something there.”

Kanzaki bit her lip.

This time Agnese asked a question.

“The highway they’re using splits, right? How about you calculate the route they will likely take to London from there and set up an inspection point?”

“…I’ll have it set up, but it isn’t a perfect measure. They use Norse magic, so they could use a spiritual item to hide their presence and existence. Or they could even just break through the inspection point.”

“Don’t be so halfhearted. If you just physically seal off all the roads…”

“We would if we could. But with limited supplies from outside the country, sealing off the internal shipping routes would just be strangling ourselves. An inspection point is all we can do.”

“But then…”

“We’ll do everything we can to stop them outside the city, but we may have to take action within London.” Kanzaki altered her grip on the cell phone. “Do you know what they’re after? Do you know specifically what they want to do in London?”

“We got a hint of that from those ‘secret activities’ I mentioned they had been carrying out.” Agnese lowered her voice. “I have no proof, but the New Light

members may have been excavating something here in Scotland. …Well, we don’t really have any document describing their plan or anything. It’s just a deduction based on the list of equipment they acquired.”

“Excavating something…?”

Kanzaki frowned.

“It seems they were mainly working at a spot where a fortress used to be, but it is unknown what they were trying to obtain. However, from the amount of time and money they spent on it, it must be central to their plan.”

It was most likely something magical like a spiritual item.

And if they were digging it up instead of making it, it must have been something that would be difficult to make with modern materials.

“I suppose it would be best to assume they excavated some spiritual item and are taking it to London to destroy something.”

“There is no proof of that, but we did find a short memo. It was dated with today’s date and had a short and simple piece of text.” Agnese paused for a second. “It said, ‘Today is the day we change England.’”

“It’s true that we can’t tell what that means, but it doesn’t sound like it has a peaceful meaning.” Kanzaki adjusted her grip on the cell phone again. “Agnese, you continue your investigation of New Light’s headquarters. See if you can find out what they excavated in Scotland and what they plan to do with it in London. If we can figure out what they’re after, it will be easier to stop them. We will try our best to intercept New Light outside of London, but we have to be prepared to do battle within London if it comes to it. Investigate the equipment New Light uses to help with that possibility.”

“Understood,” Agnese said and severed the connection.

Kanzaki then spoke to Kamijou and Index who had been staring blankly at her the entire time.

“The Amakusa Church and I will be on the lookout throughout London.”

“Are you going to fight those magicians who are in the country?”

“Yes. You…or rather, Index will go to the scene of the Eurotunnel bombing. To meet up with the investigation there, head to Folkestone.”

“Folkestone? But I thought the Eurotunnel went through a place called Dover?”

“Yes, but the terminal for the England-side entrance is a few kilometers away in the city of Folkestone. So hurry there.”

“Eh? Eh?”

Kamijou started getting flustered, but then someone interrupted.

“Oh, sorry, boy. It seems you can’t go with her to Folkestone.”

It was Second Princess Carissa.

She pointed at his right hand.

“According to the report I received, that can negate all kinds of magic. As such, it would probably be a bad thing to let you near the Eurotunnel bombing site because it’s being preserved through magical means. Also, it might have an effect on the analysis.”

“But both the Anglican Church and Academy City recognize him as Index’s guardian.”

“I understand that, but this is influencing the relationship between England and France. Not to mention that the exact workings of and theory behind that right hand are unknown. You can’t know whether it will have an effect on the investigation or not.”

“Then…” Kanzaki said hesitatingly.

“Index Librorum Prohibitorum, my sisters, and I will be heading to the terminal in Folkestone in order to carry out the Eurotunnel investigation. We will take a unit of knights as guards. A unit under the direct control of Knight Leader. That shouldn’t be a problem, right?” Carissa spoke lightly.

“If you insist on having a guard from the church along, you could always come with us to Folkestone. But I doubt you want to give up any manpower here. I have no intention of getting in your way.”

“Well, yes. But…”

Given her position, it was possible Kanzaki couldn’t actually complain.

This made it a situation where an outsider like Kamijou could speak much more easily.

“You said your sisters and you, but what about the queen?”

“My mother seems to have some kind of work at our secondary residence, Windsor Castle. She might be preparing something to use against France. It probably has something to do with the secret actions the head of the church has been taking.”

Kanzaki and Necessarius would search for the magicians heading for London.

The three princesses and Index would carry out the Eurotunnel investigation.

The queen and the head of the Anglican Church were taking secret actions at Windsor Castle.

“…But what am I supposed to do?”

“Touma!!” Index yelled with her hands on her hips before the second princess could respond. “This feeling you have of needing to go deal with every incident is a bad habit of yours!! You’re just a normal person, so you can just wait here until it’s all over!!”

“But what’s wrong with helping? Necessarius needs as many people as it can get to search, right? It would be more effective if you used my help.”

“N-no. It’s true that we can use as many people as we can get, but I can’t condone putting civilians in danger.”

That was when Queen Elizard passed by.

“Oh, right. That’s right. It isn’t necessary to force civilians to help. You can just do whatever you want here until the situation is under control.”

“See, Touma?”

Index nodded in agreement, but the queen continued speaking.

“But we can’t exactly spend the people’s tax money on room and board for someone who isn’t giving anything in return. We’ll charge you at a later date. You don’t mind right? If you just think of it like 2 or 3 suites at a ridiculously high-class hotel, it’ll actually seem like a pretty good price.”

“…Please let me help you protect England’s peace,” Kamijou said lowering his head.

Part 7

The scenery looked like something out of a milk or butter commercial.

The land had nothing but rolling green hills all the way to the horizon. An occasional barn or silo was the only obstruction. It was currently 11 PM, so the cows were asleep within the barns, but during the day, plenty of grazing cows would have been visible.

A single road cut down the green pasture dividing it in two.

A single vehicle was driving down that road. It was a small car that seemed a bit too cramped for a family to ride in. Four girls were packed inside the rental car.

One girl sitting in the backseat was sticking her head out the window. The girl was in her early teens and was wearing a bluish miniskirt and an unfashionable

jacket zipped all the way up to her neck. Her long black hair was braided together only at the end.

“Dahh. I can’t wait to be rid of this green smell…”

“Lessar, I can see your ass. And that tail is in the way,” said a displeased voice.

The voice belonged to the girl of about 18 who was sitting next to her. The silver-haired girl was wearing the same outfit as Lessar, but without the jacket. She had a long-sleeved sports shirt on and the chest portion bulged out greatly. The collar had a few small buttons, but they were all left undone leaving her cleavage slightly visible. The portion of her legs sticking out of the miniskirt had blue leggings on them down to the ankles.

She slapped the tail swaying in front of her eyes.

“If you don’t draw it in, I’m ripping it off.”

“Don’t be so mean, Bayloupe. What has you so mad anyway?”

Lessar sent an order to her tail with her eyes still looking out the window. By drawing it in, she didn’t just put it away somewhere. Instead, it started wrapping like a snake around the base of her thigh within her miniskirt.

In what may have been a necessary action to draw in her tail, Lessar raised her butt up high.

Having Lessar’s white panties thrust in her face, Bayloupe’s eyebrows twitched.

“I told you to get it out of my face!! I told you!!!!!”

“Gwaaaahhhh!? Why are you grabbing it with both hands like that!? Bayloupe, you always get mad so easily just before a mission!! Floris, please tell her to stop!!”

“Eh? But I’m concentrated on driving right now.”

The blonde girl holding the steering wheel didn’t seem to be very motivated. She was around 15 and was wearing a similar outfit to the other two. She had the jacket draped over the sports shirt and had spats on underneath the miniskirt.

“…It seems no matter how far we go, the scenery stays the same. This is a straight path, so I don’t see how I could have gotten lost, but is this really the right road, Lancis?”

The conversation turned in the direction of the brown-haired girl acting as navigator in the passenger seat.

“S-stop… That tickles…aha…Wh-whenever I take in magic power…i-it tickles so much. Ee hee hee hee hee…”

“Dammit. You always start trembling like that from the magic power you create. Whenever you purify your life energy into magic power, for some reason you always get attacked by a tickling feeling.” Floris clicked her tongue and checked on the back seat via the rearview mirror. “Hey, you two lesbians who look like you’re from some erotic novel or something. Have you finished the preparations with Skíðblaðnir? Since we managed to excavate ‘that’, we need to focus on its container.”

“You idiot!! Using your hands like that is just going to make my ass hurt!! … Eh? You mean the cases? Preparations are done on all four of them.”

“Excellent job, Lessar. I suppose I’ll tell you that Bayloupe’s weakness is her calves.”

A slight vibration rocked the car as the two switched positions. Floris took one hand from the wheel and lightly rubbed her stiff shoulders.

“My wings are doing well. …And from the looks of things, your tail is fine, too.”

Looking in the rearview mirror, she could see the wriggling tail coming from Lessar’s miniskirt as Lessar struggled. It didn’t really look like an animal’s tail. It was more like a distorted demon’s tail.

“Lancis, how are your claws doing?”

“Aheh…They’re ready….A-ah, that tickles…Ee hee.”

Hearing that response from the passenger’s seat, Floris looked back into the rearview mirror.

“You haven’t finished adjusting the scissors yet, have you? Do it before we get there. As you can see, I have my hands full driving and Lancis is useless while she’s trembling from that ticklishness of hers, so you two are the only ones who can do it.”

“I’ll do that and more if you tie up Bayloupe!! And she isn’t responding to her calves at all!!”

“What a pain,” Floris muttered as she ignored Lessar and stared straight ahead. “Now let’s get focused. After all, we’re about to destroy the very framework of the United Kingdom.”

A traffic sign stood at a fork in the road. It had English words on it and a simple diagram made of an arrow.

It signified that it was 30 km to London.

Part 8

Kamijou was sitting in the passenger seat of a convertible.

Nighttime London smelled of exhaust. Hundreds of years of historical buildings were lined up all over the place, but it was all wrapped in that stench which ruined the mood.

“I never expected to run into you here.”

“Oh. It was an unexpected turn of events for onee-san as well,” said a magician with a giggle as she gripped the steering wheel with sparkling manicured fingers.

It was Oriana Thomson.

The young woman had blonde hair, blue eyes, and very large breasts. She had once taken advantage of Academy City's large-scale sports festival, the Daihaseisai, to carry out an attack along with her partner Lidvia Lorenzetti.

She had an astounding battle ability that had allowed her to have the upper hand against Kamijou, Stiyl, and Tsuchimikado all at once, but, in the end, her plan was stopped and she was captured by the Anglican Church.

"Well, onee-san has been through a lot. I made a deal and am now working for England."

"…But the Eurotunnel bombing was done by France with the backing of the Roman Catholic Church. I don't know about the magicians acting inside the UK, but they might have some connections in that direction. Should you really be working against them?"

"Just so you know, onee-san is a magical courier. I haven't sworn loyalty to any one organization. I'm free to work with or fight against whoever I want. …So, as long as you make sure to pay, I'd even be willing to work up a sweat for you. Okay?"

Kamijou's body stiffened at having that alluring breath blown in his direction. It seemed that high school boy had various problems regarding that young woman.

"I-I see. It feels like they're expecting that you can find these magicians using your courier skills."

“Well, the skills for running away and the skills for pursuit are actually completely different, but there are some things you can’t understand until you’ve experienced them for yourself.”

“So where are we headed now?”

“There was talk about whether New Light, the suspected magic group of four, would get to London or not, but it seems the inspection point they set up ended up being useless. The traces of something odd were spotted.”

“…So they’ve already made it into London?”

“Are you aware that a few hundred thousand security cameras are set up around London? It was spotted on a camera from north London.”

As she spoke, Oriana operated the car’s navigation system with her slender fingertips. It switched to the strange video footage that looked like it was gazing down at a street from a street light.

“This is from 10 minutes ago.”

Kamijou stared at the video as it fast forwarded.

“…Hey, nothing’s happening.”

“Oh, something most certainly is. Look at the top edge of the screen. You can see the shadow of a car, can’t you?”

Once she mentioned it, Kamijou felt like he could, but he found it odd that she had showed him the footage from that specific camera. Surely there was footage from one of the other hundreds of thousands of cameras that had a better view.

“There isn’t any,” Oriana answered Kamijou’s unspoken question. “There is no footage showing where that car came from. The car was purposefully driven through the blind spots of the cameras and stopped there. …It would be quite difficult to write this off as a coincidence.”

“But is that really enough to say that the car belongs to the magicians?”

“No, but that’s why we’re headed there to find out,” Oriana said as she brought

the navigation screen back up. “London has roads running across it like the mesh of a net, but the points that are important to traffic are limited. Even more so when you’re driving through the blind spots of the cameras. Whether this is the magicians or not, we’ll catch up to them soon. If we find anything odd, we can just go check it out. All we have to do is continue doing that until we find them.”

That description made it sound like they would just fall behind, but it was the only method they had. After all, Kamijou and the others still didn’t even know what this New Light group had come to London to do.

“…Can we really find them like this?”

“Oh, it’s actually quite rare to know every little thing about the person you’re chasing after.”

Part 9

One member of New Light, Bayloupe, was leaning up against a wall near the stairs leading down into a subway station. She was keeping an eye on an old rectangular case at her feet while occasionally checking the lit-up face of a clock tower.

She used a communications spiritual item to contact the other members.

“Now then. I suppose it’s about time we started. I’ve made Lancis the keeper. If we succeed, England’s current political administration will be destroyed from its very base. London may not fare well. But there’s no real reason to destroy the city any more than is necessary.”

One member of New Light, Lancis, placed an old rectangular case on the ground and sat on it. She had a long, narrow bag in her hand and trembled while looking up at the night sky.

She used a communications spiritual item to contact the other members.

“…I-it tickles…Th-thyat’s why...fwah! Everyone’s aiming for this as the time they’ll get back…Ahah. At the very least, there’ll be less chaos than in the middle of the day…Hyaahhhh…”

One member of New Light, Floris, was walking down a small road a bit removed from the main road. She swung an old rectangular case around onto her back in a similar motion to brushing back her hair.

She used a communications spiritual item to contact the other members.

“I wish I could just put up a people-clearing field, but they’d find us right away if I did. We could use that to draw their attention away, but we halves should just end this with a swift attack.”

And…

One member of New Light, Lessar, was in a bar in a run-down area. It was at one edge of the Islington District in North London and everyone in it looked like they would drink at least 2 liters.

A girl in her early teens like Lessar clearly stood out, but she just told the muscular bartender she was in London on a trip and no restaurants were open. He then gave her some free fried fish to eat and orange juice to drink. Lessar was at a counter seat stuffing her mouth with the sizzling fried fish with the strap to a narrow, meter long bag over her shoulder. She also had an old rectangular case on the floor at her feet.

A voice came directly into Lessar’s head.

“Getting something to eat is fine, but don’t forget that you’re a half, too. We

can’t have you screwing up now.”

“I won’t, I won’t. But being the Forward sure would be nice. Oh, Bayloupe. Should we really be using communications magic in London? This is the stronghold of the 0th Parish, after all”

“It’s actually because we’re right under Necessarius’s nose that we don’t have to worry about that. Uuh…I don’t want to rely on someone like you…”

“You’re just mad because you’re hungry, aren’t you? Look, I’ll add in the olfactory information. Isn’t that smell of grease so wonderful?”

“(…Agh, and she of all people is the most powerful one in New Light in actual battle ability. Hoo, but I really do want to eat something now. Maybe some fried fish…)”

“Hee hee. Your thoughts are coming through loud and cle-..bgyah!?”

The transmission ended with a tremendous amount of static. The way Lessar held her head made it clear that it had bothered her and she then resumed her battle against the fried fish.

(Now then. After I eat this, I just have to take the case to the designated spot and wait for instructions. I wonder if England really is going to change. I hope it does…)

She started humming and kicking her feet underneath her stool when the tip of her foot bumped into the rectangular case.

(Oh, whoops…Hm?)

Lessar froze in place.

It wasn’t because the rectangular case was gone.

The case she had brought in was right there at her feet where she had left it.

But another rectangular case was sitting there, too.

They both had the exact same features and would be very hard to tell apart.

“…”

Lessar timidly looked next to her.

The customer who had been there before was gone and a large black man was sitting in the small stool and gulping down a frothy beer. The other case most likely belonged to him.

Now, which one was the case Lessar had brought in?

(Gyaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!! O-oh, crap! Oh, crap! Oh, crap! Oh, crap! Oh, crap!! Oh, crap!!!)

Bayloupe had just finished warning her and she was already in trouble.

Of course, she could tell by checking the contents. Lessar’s case was a magical item called Skíðblaðnir. When opened, its magic would activate. But she couldn’t do that. She couldn’t open the case in a place like that and activating a major piece of magic would raise the risk of being found by Necessarius.

As she thought, the large black man finished off his large mug of beer.

“Ahhh. I think I’ll leave it at that for today.”

“What? That’s only your third one.”

“My doctor’s been telling me to be a little more restrained in my drinking.”

“Then three’s already too much.”

As the large man spoke with the bartender, he started counting money out onto the counter.

(Not good. I don’t know which is which…)

For an instant, Lessar’s focus turned to the narrow, meter long bag on her back, but she managed to stop herself at the last second. Bringing out a weapon there would just cause a panic.

(Ahhh!! Which one? Which one!? Right!? Left!? Which one is Skíðblaðnir!?)

As Lessar tried to decide, the large black man reached toward one of the cases at his feet with an unsteady hand.

Lessar's small hand grabbed the large man's wrist.

"Nn?"

The man looked at Lessar with a puzzled expression.

"Th-this one's mine. That one's yours."

"Nnn!? Oh, I see, I see. Sorry about that, little girl."

With a bitter smile, the large man grabbed the other case.

As she watched the drunk black man get up from his seat, Lessar breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

(…Made it in time. Just a bit longer and Bayloupe would've ended up crushing my ass…)

If she had to guess, Lessar had felt that her case was more worn out. She had stroked the surface of the cases with her fingertips to determine which one was hers by touch.

She finally relaxed and leaned limply up against the counter. Seeing her, the bartender looked a bit worried.

"Huh? You didn't drink any alcohol did you?"

That was when Lessar saw something.

There were now 3 rectangular cases on the floor.

Sweat started dripping from her cheeks.

The other 2 must have belonged to other drunks. Or perhaps they had been left by someone. But now that she saw three of them, Lessar's confidence wavered.

(Which one is the real one? Is it this one? Is the lighting making it look different? Is this the one that black man had? I need to line them up and look at

them! Ahh, but that man is about to leave!!)

“E-Everybody, stay where you aaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrreeeeeeeeeeee!!”

…When Bayloupe learned what happened via the communications spiritual item, she started foaming at the mouth and almost passed out.

Part 10

When Kamijou and Oriana had almost made it to the car parked in the blind spot of the security cameras, Oriana suddenly changed the direction of the convertible. A staticky male voice speaking English could be heard coming from the car’s navigation system that must have functioned as a radio as well.

“According to that transmission, one of them made a major mistake!!”

“Wah!? That was from Necessarius?”

“No, it was from the London Police that are controlled by the Royal Family. It seems some idiot caused some trouble at a nearby bar!!”

A number of police cars with red and blue lights could be seen on the roadway. Oriana must have gotten permission somehow because she ignored the speed limit and roared down the road through them. When she turned right at high speed without using her turn signal, something odd caught Kamijou’s attention.

A short girl was running down the brick walkway.

She was wearing a thick jacket and a miniskirt and was carrying 3 rectangular cases for some reason.

“Umm, which one, which one, which one!? It’s this one!! Dammit. I just had to pick them up and check how much they weighed!!”

Kamijou didn’t understand her rapidly spoken English, but from her expression and gestures, it looked like she regretted something. She threw two of the cases to the roadside and ran off with the third one in hand.

But there was something beyond those odd actions that caught his attention.

It was the object she was holding between her shoulder and cheek like a businessman holding a phone.

It was a spear.

More specifically, it had a metal shaft about 1.5 meters long. It seemed to be made so it had a narrow portion of the shaft that could be packed inside a thicker portion in order to make it more portable. The end had a blade on it that made it about 40 cm longer. However, this wasn’t just one blade. It had three blades on the top of that end and single blade on the bottom of that end. The spear had what looked like a car’s brake on its lower portion which was probably a lever to open and close the blades on the end.

“What the hell is that…?”

“Probably some kind of spiritual item. She’s pretty much an explosion of suspicion, so I’d say it’s safe to assume she’s the New Light member. Do magicians really not realize how odd they look?”

“…”

Kamijou silently stared at Oriana’s body, but it seemed she didn’t notice the irony.

Oriana removed one hand from the steering wheel and stuck it into her cleavage. She pulled out a bundle of papers that looked like a booklet of flashcards. She bit one of the pages and tore it from the metal ring with a movement of her chin. She then tossed the page towards the walkway as they passed by the running girl.

“People-clearing field.”

Something seemed to activate as she spoke.

Kamijou didn't understand, but the target girl lifted her head up in surprise.

The card Oriana had tossed flipped over at about the same time as she tossed a second card.

At some point, letters had appeared on the blank page.

The yellow letters read "Fire Symbol".

That was the key to the magic used by Oriana Thomson, a courier who never used the same spell twice.

An explosion of flame ripped through the walkway.

The nearby shutters and windows rattled and the darkness of the night was lit up with a crimson light.

Having confirmed the explosion, Oriana pulled on the hand brake and turned the wheel to the side sharply making a U-turn without losing much momentum. Once the convertible was facing the explosion, she stopped the car.

Kamijou started panicking.

"H-hey!! Wasn't that a bit much!?"

"No, this is actually quite bad!!"

As she yelled her response, Oriana threw open the car door and practically jumped out of the convertible.

Kamijou looked on in confusion until a metallic scraping noise reached his ears.

The noise was coming from the side.

He didn't have time to turn his head in that direction. In an amount of time that could only be called an instant, he barely managed to move just his eyes in that direction to see the girl from before sliding along right next to the passenger seat. As the girl moved along at what seemed like the speed of a bullet, something was following behind her. It was a tail. The tail was stretching out

from within her skirt and it was a flat metal chain within a clear tube much like a bicycle chain lock.

Their eyes suddenly met.

“No complaints, right?” she said in English.

The girl struck the metal door with the end of her spear.

She was intending to pierce straight through the door and into Kamijou’s gut.

“O-Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

Kamijou ignored the structure of the car, stepped up on the passenger seat, and jumped forward towards the hood. The instant he kicked off from the seat, the four blades pierced the door and he felt them scrape lightly along the bottom of his basketball shoes.

The shock of the metal door being torn through reached him an instant later.

Kamijou landed on the hood and then jumped down to the roadway.

He heard an odd roar and spun around to find that the short girl in her lower teens had torn off the convertible’s passenger side door. With the end of the spear still stuck in the door, she had forcefully swung the spear around by its handle. In contrast to the ridiculously violent scene, the tail coming from her miniskirt swayed humorously.

The girl then swung the spear, door and all. She wasn’t stabbing; she was swinging it down. However, she wasn’t aiming for Kamijou.

She was aiming for the back of the convertible – specifically the fuel tank.

With a cracking noise, the metal wall easily broke. The tip of the spear sank into the fuel tank.

With a tremendous noise, the convertible exploded.

But that wasn’t what surprised Kamijou.

The flame should have spread out in all directions, but the four blades on the

girl’s spear forcibly “grabbed” it.

He had no idea how it worked, but the four blades opened up like they were human fingers. They then forcefully closed again and the flames that were about to spread out were restrained.

The flames leaked from the gaps between the four blades, but they were given a new form in the air.

The flames became an unnatural block-shaped crimson mass. The sides weren’t even in length, but no side was longer than about a meter.

The four blades looked like a fork stabbed into a giant carrot.

Instead of extinguishing, the flames moved along with the motions of the four blades.

The girl swung the spear with the mass of flames down like it was a hammer and met Kamijou’s gaze as he had fallen to the ground.

She smiled.

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand to cover himself, but she altered the trajectory diagonally a bit to slip past it.

“You’re kidding, right…!?”

Kamijou’s body froze up and he used just his eyes to follow the flame-covered spear the girl with the miniskirt and tail was swinging down.

A shock then knocked the girl to the side.

Her body doubled over from the impact caused by Oriana’s magic.

Her small body flew a few meters. She was still holding the spear, but the giant mass of flames slipped away like a carrot flying from a fork when it was swung around. The mass of flames flew off at an odd angle and exploded sending orange light around the area.

Even then, the girl did not collapse.

The bottom of her shoes scraped along the ground as she killed her momentum and she used the rectangular case in her other hand to stop Oriana's magic.

Smoke rose from the surface of the case and the light of the girl's eyes shined from behind the shield.

But then…

"Ahhhhhhh!? I used the most important thing as a shield without thinking!!"

Kamijou couldn't understand a word of her native English, but the magician seemed to be panicking.

Kamijou turned from the flustered girl who had just tried to kill him and spoke.

"Hey, Oriana. I don't really understand, but that rectangular case seems to be an important item. I'd rather not kick a girl's ass, so let's focus on that case instead."

"Fine with me. If it's a type of spiritual item, it should be interesting to see what happens if you punch it with your right hand."

The girl's shoulders jumped upon hearing that short strategy meeting.

"W-well done determining my weakness in such a short time! But I can't let it be destroyed here! In order to prevent my ass from being crushed by Bayloupe, I'll have to make a strategic withdrawal here. Toh!!"

The girl moved her tail like a pendulum once and then jumped straight up into the air.

Their fight had not caused an uproar because Oriana had used a people-clearing field at the last second.

The girl herself didn't seem too worried about causing a scene, though.

"Dammit… Can we follow her!?" cursed Kamijou.

If she could jump like that, she could ignore the layout of streets and go about the city as she pleased. It would be difficult to chase her in a car, much less on

foot. After all, a car had to follow the roads.

“That isn’t necessarily the case,” Oriana said in response to Kamijou’s unease. “Even if she can travel inside buildings and along rooftops, she’s still limited. The buildings are built along the streets. If she is going to use the buildings to travel, she will naturally have to follow the flow of buildings.”

“?”

“You don’t get it? If she comes across a wide road with 3 or 4 lines on each side, she won’t be able to reach the next building. It’s just like having a road cut off by a wide river.”

“Can’t she jump from the building down to the road!?”

“If she could do that, she wouldn’t need the tail. She uses it to ensure her balance in midair. Some types of monkeys use their tails in the same way when jumping from branch to branch. Since she prepared a spiritual item like that, she must be afraid of heights above a certain point!”

That meant there were some things the magician girl couldn’t do.

Her escape route was naturally limited.

“Shall we go after her?”

“Of course!!”

Kamijou and Oriana nodded and ran into the London night.

Part 11

About a kilometer away from that turmoil, another member of New Light, Bayloupe, stood near the entrance to a subway station holding her head.

(That idiot…!! How could she cause an uproar that not only got the attention of the 0th Parish, but of the normal London police, too!?)

Even then, she could hear a high pitched voice yelling “Help, help!” through the communications spiritual item, but Bayloupe’s thoughts were turning in the direction of wanting to finish the girl off herself.

The stairway into the subway area was surrounded on three sides by walls. It was almost midnight and the time for the last train must have been nearing because a large number of company workers and drunks were pouring down the stairway. Amid it all, Bayloupe was leaning against one of the walls focusing on the meter long bag hanging on her back and the old rectangular case lying on the floor at her feet.

(…At the very least, one of them must be activated. All I can do is wait for Lancis to contact me. The real problem is that we don’t know the coordinates until the last second. Having to ad lib everything due to the unknown destination makes this difficult.)

She sighed and folded her arms as she watched the company workers walk by. Amid the stereotypical English securities men, she caught sight of the occasional Japanese person. The black hair stood out amid all the blond heads. Her eye was naturally drawn to them and, once the number of heads with black hair grew to 8 or 9, she realized that everyone around her was Japanese.

“…!?”

Having been surrounded, Bayloupe looked to the bag on her back. One girl stepped forward from the group of Japanese and approached Bayloupe.

“We are from Necessarius, the 0th Parish of the Anglican Church. Do you understand?” The girl, Itsuwa of the Amakusa Church, spoke in a manner similar to a police officer.

Despite the fact that they were still amid the crowd of passersby, she was already wielding a type of cross spear.

In response to that introduction that only those on that path would understand, Bayloupe pulled the edges of her lips up in a smile with her arms still folded.

“…So you’ve already made it this far?”

“We are a sect that focuses on blending in with the environment. This also makes us proficient in the techniques needed to find those who do not belong. These skills were originally used for early detection of spies of the shogunate mixed in with the townspeople, though.”

“Tch. I see. So you’re affiliated with them. The 0th Parish really does just gather whatever personnel it can, doesn’t it?”

“We will have you accompany us to the Tower of London. Just in case, would you like to verify what you are being charged with?”

“No thanks.”

Bayloupe unfolded her arms and put her hands in her pockets. In a motion much like putting on headphones, she attached what looked a bit like hearing aids behind her ears. However, on each side, there were two of what looked like vacuum tubes sticking out of them.

“Until this case is activated…”

With her special ears – or perhaps they could be called horns – put in, Bayloupe stuck the tip of her foot into the handle of the rectangular case lying on the ground.

“I have no intention of being captured!!”

She kicked the case up into the air and grabbed it with one hand. Using that motion as a sign, Itsuwa unreservedly struck with her spear. She was aiming to thrust the spear into the joint between Bayloupe’s right shoulder and right arm.

A roar of sliced air resounded.

But Bayloupe’s soft flesh was not torn.

This was due to the bag hanging from her shoulder. In response to her will, it

tore from the inside and she swung the weapon inside horizontally. The weapon couldn’t quite be called a spear and it couldn’t quite be called a hand. It was a long metal pole with four blades stuck on the end. It struck Itsuwa’s spear causing sparks to fly and the two of them were knocked back.

If Kamijou had been there, he would have recognized the weapon as the same type of weapon the magician girl he had run into had.

“…!?”

Along with the high pitched clang caused by the blow, the Japanese surrounding Itsuwa and Bayloupe pulled out their hidden swords and axes. Bayloupe was surrounded by sinister shining steel, but she still smiled fearlessly. She put even more strength into the hand holding her weapon.

She swung her weapon by rotating her entire body.

Itsuwa stood at the ready, but the attack was not aimed for any of the Amakusas. Bayloupe destroyed the concrete wall she had been leaning up against previously.

The stairway down to the subway was surrounded by walls on three sides and Bayloupe’s intentions in smashing the wall like a biscuit were clear.

She was going to flee.

Itsuwa let out a frustrated breath as she attacked with her spear. However, her strike did not pierce Bayloupe’s body. Bayloupe had already gone with the rubble down into the subway station the stairway connected to.

“Itsuwa!!”

“I know!! Tatemiya-san, you and everyone else guard the entrances and exits!!” Itsuwa yelled in response to her colleague and ran down to the subway station. She didn’t really use the stairs. Instead, she just jumped down to the lower floor all at once.

When she landed, she stuck a hand into her pocket and pulled out a gun. The magazine was only loaded with blanks, but she still pulled the trigger.

Multiple eardrum-piercing gun shots reverberated throughout the underground area.

Hearing that noise, the passengers all headed for the exits. They must have thought there was a terrorist or a gunman. Before long, all the panicked people had left the underground area.

(Tatemiya-san and the others are watching the customer exits. If the magician is still in the station, we don't have to worry about getting civilians involved now.)

Itsuwa threw the now-empty handgun to the side and raised her spear again. As a magician, she could have set up a people-clearing field, but sometimes a physical method was more effective in an emergency situation. Especially since the Amakusas drew out the magical meanings from the normal objects around them. When it might take some time to find the necessary items, the way she handled it was much faster.

She ran down a fairly long passageway with ticket machines and automatic ticket gates at the end. Itsuwa jumped over a ticket gate as if it were a hurdle and continued running to the platform.

She arrived right when Bayloupe was about to climb down from the empty platform. She was most likely thinking of running directly into the tunnel instead of getting on a train.

Itsuwa's and Bayloupe's gazes clashed.

"…!!"

"…!?"

In that instant, Bayloupe made the first move.

Holding the rectangular case in one hand, she gave a large swing of the 4-bladed weapon that was part spear and part hand. She was throwing the sign it held.

The sign flew more than 10 meters until it was sliced to pieces by 7 strikes right before Itsuwa's eyes.

She hadn't done it with her spear.

She had laid out 7 wires.

“The Norse symbol of supernatural strength,” Itsuwa said as she held up her spear and silently walked forward while measuring the distance between them. “Its form almost led me astray, but that is not a spear. The magical symbol leads me to feel that it belongs to the thunder god Thor who is known for his valor. But…”

“Please don’t be so stupid as to say it’s the thunder hammer Mjölnir. When the Christian Church is taught in northern Europe, the hammer is often used in many magical ways in the cultures that have no cross. However, that is not what we are using.” Bayloupe grinned. “Thor is famous for Mjölnir, but he used weapons other than that once. They were weapons he borrowed from a certain female giant. This is a spiritual item created from an analysis of that story. It is the steel glove. It is much more convenient for a girl to use.”

“A weapon for a girl to use…?”

“Sorry, but all the members of New Light aim to be gorgeous girls. A spiritual item made from an analysis of Mjölnir would be a bit too heavy to use easily.”

Bayloupe stabbed the end of the glove forward.

She moved the lever on the lower portion of the grip and the four blades opened and closed like human fingers.

“First of all, we don’t even think of Thor as merely a thunder god. Thor is essentially a god of agriculture, so his lightning strikes are interpreted as just one of the weather-controlling powers he has as the god that rules over the blessings of nature. Even so, Mjölnir is too strongly associated with the thunder god aspect, so we decided to prepare a weapon that isn’t just used as a means of attack and possesses the softer side of a god of agriculture.”

Itsuwa held out the tip of her spear and carefully estimated the distance between them.

As she did, Bayloupe continued speaking.

“As a substitute for Mjölnir, Thor borrowed a belt that increased his arm strength, an iron club with exceedingly powerful destructive force, and the iron

gloves. The role of the gloves is unknown, but we interpreted them as an interface to accurately control very powerful spiritual items. In any case, there was one thing we ended up saying.” As she spoke, Bayloupe spun the steel glove around and struck the floor of the platform with the four-bladed tip. “Wouldn’t it be easier to just have all of them in one spiritual item?”

The four blades sunk into the tile floor.

With the steel glove still stuck into the floor, she swung it forward with all her strength. Like a golf club hitting a bunker, a large amount of small fragments flew toward Itsuwa.

“…!!”

Itsuwa curled up her body as the barrage went by and then charged in. But Bayloupe spun the steel glove around in one hand like a tree branch and immediately attacked.

But this was not a slashing attack.

The steel glove “grabbed” something.

(The wind? …No, the dust in the air!?)

Just as Itsuwa realized it, the concrete powder expanded with explosive force near her face.

With a loud blast, Itsuwa’s body was blown to the side. The bottoms of her shoes slid along the ground as she tried to slow herself down and Bayloupe jumped up. At about a meter up, she curled up her legs and thrust in rotating vertically.

She was still holding the steel glove and, as before, it was “grabbing” a large amount of condensed dust.

(Not good!! And that thing’s bad enough with her arm strength alone…!!)

For an instant, Itsuwa brought her spear up to block out of reflex, but then she relaxed her muscles and jumped to the side. It was just too much force to block. Meanwhile, Bayloupe rotated twice in midair and used centrifugal force to swing down the steel glove. Her arm strength and the power of the dust caused the

floor of the subway station to explode like a volcano.

Itsuwa had avoided a direct hit, but her body flew spinning through the air.

She had been hit by a few of the scattered fragments.

Even so, she did not fall to the ground. Like a figure skater who had failed a jump, she landed on the tips of her toes. Bayloupe “grabbed” more dust from the air and swung her weapon to the side towards Itsuwa.

Itsuwa had already lost her balance, so she couldn’t move back any further.

The large amount of dust expanded near her as if it had exploded.

“G…Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

Having received a direct hit that time, Itsuwa’s body was thrown to the ground and then knocked a good distance back. The handle of the Friuli spear she was holding broke to pieces and scattered about the area. The tip spun through the air and stabbed into the ground right next to Itsuwa’s face.

Holding the rectangular case in one hand, Bayloupe leaned the steel glove up against her shoulder with the other hand.

“Looks like this is over. We can go on if you like, but I’ll be using the horn of wisdom, the Gjallarhorn, next.”

As she spoke, she used the hand she had been holding the case with to lightly touch the side of her head as if she were checking on headphones she was wearing.

She had hearing aid-like devices behind ears with two vacuum tube-like objects sticking from each one.

“To reproduce the steel gloves, we gave them the destructive power of the club obtained from the female giant, the increased arm strength of the belt, and gave it the ability to 'grab'. But by adding in wisdom, I become the only member of New Light that can also partially use the thunder attribute. Unlike Thor, I use it in a different way than using Mjölnir. If you don’t want to be turned to ashes, I suggest you remain where you are.”

Itsuwa wiped the blood spilling from her mouth with the back of her hand, but she did not stand up.

Bayloupe grabbed the case again before speaking.

“With this, we will change the history of the United Kingdom. We will change the Royal Family, the knights, the church, England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. But it isn’t all bad. Make sure you enjoy the change we will be bringing about.”

With the case still in one hand, Bayloupe straddled the steel glove like a witch’s broomstick.

She did not fly with it.

The tip of the steel glove, the four blades, grabbed the floor. Then the individual blades skillfully moved causing it to move across the ground as if it were walking on tentacles. Riding the steel glove, Bayloupe jumped from the platform and disappeared at high speed into the train tunnel.

“……”

Itsuwa remained motionless for a bit.

Finally, she slowly stood up and reached over to a microphone on a pillar used for announcements.

Straddling the steel glove like a witch’s broomstick, Bayloupe held the rectangular case in one hand and held the grip of the steel glove upside down with her other hand. She moved down the train tracks at the same speed as a car on the highway.

She gave a slow sigh and relaxed her shoulders.

(…At least I managed to escape trouble for now. I’m sure Lancis is fine, but I’m worried about Floris. Really, it’s all because of Lessar’s incredibly stupid mistake!!)

Bayloupe clicked her tongue.

She gave the steel glove instructions to match the gentle curve of the tunnel. She decided to head for either a nearby station or an exit for workers. As she thought about that, she realized something was odd.

(…Why was there a curve just now?)

According to the route map, the rail was nothing but a straight line to the next station. The route made no curve and there shouldn’t have been any branching points.

Bayloupe stopped the steel glove and stood on the tracks.

She thought she might have entered some strange path, but she couldn’t have. There had been only one path up to that point. But then why had the track curved? And where did that unnaturally curving track lead to?

As she thought, a sudden voice reached her ears.

It was coming from a speaker installed in the subway tunnel. It was most likely intended to be used to inform workers of coming trains. A familiar voice was speaking.

“…It won’t really help to explain it to you now, but I’m sure you know that all of Necessarius’s battle personnel must have a certain level of skill.”

The voice was that of the girl she had just fought on the subway platform.

She wasn’t sure what the girl was getting at, but she had a bad feeling about it.

“As such, there are a surprising number of magical facilities throughout London used to test the skill of new members. They are something like labyrinthine obstacle courses full of traps. So can you make a guess where that track that was magically ‘switched over’ to an unnatural curve could be leading?”

“It can’t be…”

Bayloupe was already trapped within the spell.

Itsuwa left some final words for Bayloupe now that she could no longer escape.

“Make sure to work hard to ensure you don’t die. From what I’ve heard, someone failed in regulating that labyrinth’s difficulty. It’s off limits now because people kept dying in it.”

Part 12

Modern traps were made to be quite convenient. The giant spiritual item in the form of a labyrinth was made so the victims that succumbed to the traps would be automatically transported out and any items that were dropped partway

through were separated and collected.

Itsuwa was at the subway station's lost article storage room. Simply put, it was a room where items people had left behind or dropped were gathered.

A rectangular case and a single sheet of parchment had been collected there. The results from the tested actions and battles within the labyrinth and an objective result of the person's battle ability as a magician were recorded on the parchment. It seemed those periodic tests were still being carried out to this day.

She heard a faint rummaging sound.

It was coming from a duct near the ceiling. As a new member of Necessarius, Itsuwa wasn't sure, but she thought it must have something to do with the mechanism that somehow connected the labyrinth to the lost article storage room. Itsuwa tried to peer inside it, but…

"Ignore any sounds you hear from there. Its self defense functionality is active."

Itsuwa hurriedly turned around upon hearing that sudden voice from behind her.

A woman wearing a worn out black gothic lolita dress was standing there. The woman's name was Sherry Cromwell and she had blonde hair like a lion and light brown skin. She was a senior magician to Itsuwa within Necessarius.

"This was originally created as a test facility for battle-hardened Necessarius members. It's been toned down a bit this time, but it'll still tear you to pieces if you let your guard down."

"…Ha. Ah ha ha." Itsuwa drew back and a laugh came out.

The rectangular case that Bayloupe of New Light had protected to her utmost had dark red stains in places.

"Don't be so scared. This test facility was too much so it isn't being used anymore. For the periodic tests these days, they just throw you in an empty room for a week and make you magically create food, water, and anything else you need to survive."

"Um…That sounds bad enough on its own," said Itsuwa as she gave a bitter

smile because she wasn’t quite sure how to respond. “Sorry for calling you here this late.”

“I’m not a nun, so I don’t have to follow all those rules. I have no set time I go to bed.”

Starting with Sherry’s direct battle style of using a golem, she was an expert in deciphering the magical codes hidden in spiritual items as well as in arts and crafts such as symbolic paintings and religious sculptures.

She scratched at her disorderly blonde hair with one hand.

“You know, I don’t mind helping out Anglican magicians, but I don’t like doing something that helps out those damn knights.”

“Hah?”

“Nothing. I guess worrying about the past isn’t going to help anything. I need to focus on my work here. You called me here because there was something you wanted me to take a look at, right?”

“Y-yes.”

Itsuwa had called in Sherry to investigate the workings of a certain spiritual item.

Sherry turned her gaze towards the rectangular case on the metal shelf of the lost article storage room.

“Is this the item in question?”

“Yes. Please analyze it.”

Sherry gave a slight breath from her nose and put on the thin gloves one used to handle antiques.

“Optical illusion techniques are harder to use with three dimensional objects than with pictures. After all, they must be constructed or carved without relying on making objects bigger or smaller to show perspective. That’s actually one of the reasons I like the genre.”

“Huh? But aren’t there types of three dimensional trick art that use a large ball and a small ball to show perspective? You think it’s just two balls, but when you change the angle…Things like that.”

“When the viewing angle is fixed, it isn’t that much different from a flat picture. That kind of optical illusion can’t be done at all angles. It looks one way from the front and another from the side. Frankly, that’s the same kind of art that can be constructed in a picture.”

She felt across the contours of the case.

Her analysis as a magician that specialized in sculptures began.

“…It is primarily made of oak. The wood was carved down to only a few millimeters thick and then exposed to steam until it would bend. It is a complicated structure, but no nails or screws were used. It was made similarly to the weaving of bamboo baskets or the creation of wooden mosaics. It was complexly made by hand, but it could also be taken apart by hand and rearranged in a different form.”

“U-umm…? What does that mean?”

“The case was made so that it could transform.” Sherry lightly clenched her fist and lightly knocked on the side of the case with the back of her hand. “And its original form was not that of a case. Some other object was folded up in a regulated way much like origami in order to forcibly give it the shape of a case. If I recall correctly, New Light’s field of expertise is Norse. In that case…”

“Hehh. Origami, huh?”

While listening to Sherry’s explanation, Itsuwa casually stretched her hand out towards the surface of the rectangular case.

When she did, she heard a clicking noise.

It was the noise of the case unlocking due to its lock being broken from the beating it took in the test facility.

Immediately afterwards…

“Wah! Wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah!?”

The rectangular case expanded.

It didn’t just expand to two or three times its size. The growing mass of wood destroyed the shelf it was sitting on and went on to knock over the metal shelves lined up like in a library one after another.

When it stopped expanding, the rectangular case had become a large boat.

It looked like a large canoe made of wood. It was more than 10 meters long.

Sherry sighed in exasperation.

“…I think you’re harboring airheadedness on the level of Orsola Aquinas.”

“D-don’t say that!! There’s no way I could possibly be as bad as that nun!!” denied Itsuwa frantically.

Orsola Aquinas was a specialist at solving written codes, but she was an extremely large-breasted nun well known for being airheaded and moving at her own pace.

Itsuwa became a bit embarrassed about the state of the lost article storage room and averted her gaze from Sherry.

“C-come to think of it, did you not call Orsola here for this? The field may be different, but I get the feeling that she is very good at analysis work.”

“I decided not to in order to make sure no mistakes like this would happen.”

“Oh,” said Itsuwa in a (to men) cute-sounding voice.

Sherry looked over in an annoyed fashion towards the case that had transformed into a large boat.

“…So its original form was a boat. From a Norse mythology standpoint, Skíðblaðnir would fit best I suppose.”

“Skíðblaðnir? Isn’t that the boat that can hold all of the Æsir including Odin? From what I heard, it could be folded up until it was small enough to fit in a

bag.”

Of course, the boat before them was not the legendary boat. It was just a spiritual item with that name. However, since that story had been referenced, there had to be some kind of connection.

“Well, the case was just being used to transport something. Something else was likely put inside this ship in order to carry it around. …What could they have been trying to transport that required preparing the finest of ships that the gods chose to ride in?”

“…That’s the cornerstone of New Light’s plan,” Itsuwa muttered.

The item within, not the case itself, was the important item that would overthrow England.

The case they were looking at was clearly empty, but it was clear New Light’s objective wasn’t just to transport the case itself. It seemed that New Light’s plan was centered around bringing whatever they had excavated in Scotland to London.

However, it didn’t make sense that Bayloupe was just a dummy and one of her comrades actually had whatever it was.

“When I was fighting the magician who held this, she never let go of the case even once during the battle. A dummy case doesn’t seem like enough reason to add the risks created by fighting with one hand in order to protect it. If she ended up being killed along with the dummy, she would have lost everything.”

The piece of parchment that had come from the testing ground along with the case recorded her test actions and battles. From the looks of it, Bayloupe had continued guarding the rectangular case even after her steel glove had broken and then to the very moment she had passed out. That was clearly not how one would treat a mere dummy case.

“So it still has a secret left. A secret that gave her a reason to protect this empty case.”

Sherry reached into her pocket and pulled out a small brush and magnifying glass as if she were about to excavate a fossil. It seemed she now had a genuine

desire to investigate.

“So it isn’t just a mere jack-in-the-box. I can investigate its detailed effects as a spiritual item, but I can’t guarantee that I will find anything anytime soon. Agnese and her unit were doing a search of New Light’s base in Edinburgh, right? They may find something before I do.”

“U-understood. Thank you very much.”

“No problem. You head back aboveground and destroy the remaining pieces of trash.”

Sherry didn’t even turn around as she gave that relaxed reply, so Itsuwa bowed once more and exited the lost article storage room.

She ran through the subway station heading for the exit and, just in case, contacted Agnese with her cell phone. Technically, she didn’t use the phone line. She used a magical technique instead.

Instead of coming from the small speaker installed on the phone, Agnese’s voice was created from vibrations of the strap.

“No, I’m sorry. We have investigated it, but we haven’t gotten any information on Skíðblaðnir. We will focus our search in that direction from now on though.”

“I see. Please do,” responded Itsuwa as she walked up the stairs and aboveground.

“So we’ve finally taken one of them out, huh? According to the information on them, New Light has 4 members. If there are still 3 of them left, this is still pretty bad.”

“I actually have some good news in that regard,” Itsuwa muttered in the direction of the phone.

Something had just cut across right in front of Itsuwa followed by a sound of destruction. She looked in the direction of the noise and saw a girl sunk into a large sign. The remains of a wing-shaped spiritual item were scattered about the area and the girl had flown over 20 meters without hitting the ground before slamming into the sign.

Itsuwa looked at the girl who had clearly lost consciousness and spoke.

“There are only 2 left.”

Itsuwa looked in the direction the girl had flown from just in time to see Priestess Kanzaki Kaori putting her sword back in its scabbard. It seemed she had knocked the girl away with her strength. Apparently, the effects of the steel glove were nothing compared to the physical strength of a Saint.

Itsuwa severed the connection with Agnese, picked up the rectangular case that had fallen to the walkway, and regrouped with Kanzaki and the rest of the Amakusas.

“I-it looks like there wasn’t just one case.”

“Yes. If the important contents are not in that case, we have no choice but to go after the next one. It looks like we can’t relax until we stop all of them, but I would prefer to avoid any violent means.”

Part 13

A lamp giving off a faint light shook slightly on the roof of a carriage with a luxurious interior.

The carriage was heading down a dark path with almost no street lights about 100 km away from the center of London. The carriage was not alone. With the large carriage at the center, there were about a dozen carriages in a row. The carriages weren’t particularly armored, but the cavalry-like horses flanking them were covered in formal protectors.

It was a scene right out of a picture book or a fairy tale, but they were all moving

at over 500 kph despite their antique appearance. This was not due to the abilities of the carriages. It was due to the magical effect of the magic circles that had been set at fixed intervals when the old pathway had been constructed. From a distance, the line of carriages may have looked like lit linear motor cars.

The carriages were colored with gold leaf and other precious metals giving them an unreal glitter, but what stood out the most was the large carriage in the middle that was travelling with a large number of guards.

It was known as the Travelling Fortress.

It was a long distance convoy carriage solely for the British Royal Family.

The parade carriage had a license plate for travelling on public roads and its wheels and wooden frame were strengthened, but it was also thoroughly fortified with over 700 spiritual items and magic circles.

Inside the decorated carriage that looked like it was from a fairy tale were 3 women.

They were Second Princess Carissa, Third Princess Villian, and Index.

"…So our older sister really didn't come," muttered Carissa while staring out the window.

The skirt of her dress was spread out to the limit and she was taking up a space that would normally have fit 3 people. In contrast, Villian had folded up her clothes as much as possible and was forcing herself to fit in half of the usual space a person would take up.

"She finds it a bit hard to trust people," she responded hesitantly.

"I wouldn't call that 'a bit'. Even if you prepared her a carriage strong enough to last for 3 days even if you threw it into the sun, she would still factor in a risk of attack."

"Isn't that why, though? She is the kind of person that refuses to trust in security that someone else set up. If you prepare it all for her like that, she is not going to get in it. She cannot trust things that she cannot check on for herself. …You do know she detached her private room at Windsor Castle and rearranged it as she

saw fit, right?”

“I can understand getting a pet just to get an idea what it’s like, but she is constantly sneaking out of the palace and into the city.”

“I believe she said that the words of townspeople who do not know who she is hold no malice.”

“Hmph,” said Carissa. “Right now the Eurotunnel is more important than her anyway.”

Carissa glanced over at Index who was idly kicking her feet because she had nothing to do.

“Even though our country is protected by Curtana Second, it is not guaranteed to have eternal prosperity. Even with the people obeying the queen as the leader of the angels and the knights as an army of angels, the country will still cease to function if a large number of people riot. And we can’t exactly wipe them all out with a great flood like in the scriptures.”

“…”

“To avoid a crisis like that, the knights work in the public view and, when the knights fail, the church works in secret to keep the peace in various ways. However, the Eurotunnel bombing, and the attempted terrorist attack on the passenger plane back to back have been more than enough to shake the people of our country.”

“But,” Villian carefully chose her words, “even if France was involved in that series of events, the Roman Catholic Church most likely influenced them. What will only blaming France solve?”

“You may be right, but even if someone else is pulling the strings, France needs to be stopped.” Carissa folded her arms. “The Vatican is strong. We can’t bring it down quickly, so the only other option is a drawn out war. For that, we need to create a supply base on the front lines. That makes this a geographic issue. We have to do whatever it takes to get France to ‘cooperate’ so we can construct a base right in front of the Vatican.”

“Aren’t you forgetting the option of creating a large scale supply base on the

Mediterranean and simply applying pressure?”

“France is the one guarding the Mediterranean. That would still require quieting them down. Also, a sea fortress would require guarding against attack both from the air and within the sea, so I wouldn’t really call it a realistic option. There is also the issue of strength. If a land base’s walls are broken, they can be closed up again, but a single hole can sink one on the sea.”

Villian frowned uneasily and brought her hands up to her chest.

“…We can request for cooperation from France. Is this really something that can only be solved militarily?”

“If you really think it isn’t, just tell me how.”

Villian looked up after hearing Carissa’s words.

“Our sister specializes in her intellect, I specialize in the military, and you specialize in that benevolence of yours. This kind of method is naturally all that comes to my mind, but you may be able to find a more effective method. … Perhaps even one to deal with the Roman Catholic Church as well as France.”

“Sister…”

“And to gather the information needed to make a decision, we need to investigate the cause of the Eurotunnel explosion. If you want to lead us to the best solution, make sure you stay focused. We’ll be in Folkestone soon. We’re almost to the Eurotunnel terminal that connects to Dover.”

Part 14

Kamijou Touma ran through London late at night.

He didn't know it, but the girl he was chasing after was named Lessar. He wasn't foolishly running directly after the New Light member. Kamijou was running through a straight, narrow pathway between buildings.

He heard a high-pitched noise travel across the nighttime city above his head.

It was the security alarms of the different buildings. Lessar was jumping from building to building breaking out of a 3rd or 4th floor window on one and into another next. This activated the alarms each time, so it gave the illusion that it was a mass of sound that was travelling along.

The buildings must have been empty business buildings because he didn't hear any screams or any other signs of a commotion from within, but he doubted the girl really cared about that. There was no sign of a people clearing field having been set up and Kamijou was willing to bet that the girl would cut through a building even if it caused a commotion.

(Ahh!! What's with her careless methods!? She isn't acting at all like a magician trying to be covert!!)

Kamijou continued running as he yelled internally.

That was when something changed.

He all of a sudden realized something was moving alongside him.

It was a small orange pumpkin.

The pumpkin was about the size of a clenched fist and it had eyes and a mouth carved into it. The small pumpkin was moving along a nearby alley wall so as to meet Kamijou's gaze.

"From the looks of you, you aren't a magician or even from the UK. Why is someone like you chasing after me?" said a young female voice in a joking manner. The voice was speaking in Japanese. "I apologize if you're just an immigrant living in Japantown, but you aren't, are you? I can smell it. I doubt you know all that much about England."

“…Are you from New Light!?”

“Correct. I am Lessar of New Light. If you’re just a civilian I want to ask you to just leave, but since you’re working with the 0th Parish and you know our organization’s name, I don’t really know what to make of the situation.”

Her words made her sound troubled, but there was no seriousness in her voice.

(She’s making fun of me.)

“Well, whether you’re a magician or not, you’re still out since you aren’t from the UK. You’re not qualified to participate in this. Don’t get involved in what doesn’t concern you and just leave.”

“I’m not qualified to participate!? What the hell are you talking about!?” shouted Kamijou in a voice that rang throughout the narrow alleyway.

The pumpkin responded with a voice that sounded like someone giving directions.

“Of course you aren’t qualified. As representatives of the magicians living in the UK, we are carrying out this absurd plan to send the country in a better direction. If someone were to appear to block our path, they have to at least love the UK as much as we do to have any legitimacy at all. This isn’t an issue a traveller can get involved in.”

“Fuck that! We know you people excavated some strange spiritual item in Scotland and have brought it to London! You’re clearly planning on doing something horrible. How can I just ignore that!?”

“Oh, so that’s what the 0th Parish’s analysis came up with. Well, I’d have to be an idiot to give a hint to the enemy, so we can just go with that.”

“What are you saying?”

“You don’t really need to understand, but I’ll say this: all we want to do is give a last-minute course change to the UK since it will definitely lose in a war as it is now.”

The girl did not deny having excavated a spiritual item, having brought it to

London, or planning on activating it.

The specifics of New Light's plan weren't clear, but Kamijou couldn't imagine that it would result in anything good.

"Anyway, this is an issue that only the people living in the UK can feel real urgency about. I doubt you'll willingly kill someone who isn't clearly evil, so just keep quiet about this. You're just the kind of person that gets enraged over things that don't concern you."

With those words, the pumpkin burst.

As colorful paper streamers spewed from the pumpkin as if it were a party cracker, Kamijou punched at it with his right hand knowing it wouldn't be any good.

(Dammit! She isn't just fast, but she's tracking my route of pursuit even though she shouldn't be able to see me here!! I wonder how she's doing!?)

Kamijou clicked his tongue and ran out of the small path to a larger one. This one was a large road with 3 lanes on either side. It was almost midnight, but there were still plenty of cars heading home and late-night buses going by.

Kamijou stopped running.

The bottoms of his feet slid across the ground due to his sudden stop and he looked up at a certain portion of one of the buildings.

Specifically, the 3rd floor window.

Lessar was standing in shock with both hands on the reinforced glass. She had an astounding jumping ability and was excellent at jumping up onto things, but apparently she had no way of softening the blow of jumping back down.

She also could not jump all the way across the large road all at once.

Lessar had basically run into a dead end and then yet another hardship came for her.

Oriana had caught up with Lessar and dropkicked her in the back.

The reinforced glass shattered and Lessar's body was thrown out into the air.

The plan Oriana had suggested had been as follows: *I'll kick her down from the building next to the large road, so you catch her down below.*

Kamijou spread out his arms and yelled up at Lessar.

"Ha ha ha!! You're either dead or captuuuuuuurrrred!!"

"…!?"

Lessar was at a loss for words and she couldn't do anything about her situation.

That was when Kamijou realized something.

Raining down along with the girl's small body were hundreds of glittering glass shards.

"I-I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead!!"

"Hey, don't go hide!! If you don't catch me, I'll die!!"

After yelling something in English, Lessar held out her four-bladed spear, the steel glove. She struck the wall of the building with the end and, with a tremendous noise, Lessar's body flew horizontally.

She continued on between the trees on the side of the road and hit a pile of Halloween decorations. She fell down further and further breaking the decorations as she went. She seemed to have used them for cushioning and she landed on the ground with her clothes torn up. She then turned her back on Kamijou and ran off again.

Kamijou was completely dumbfounded and he saw Oriana's face poke out from the shattered 3rd floor window.

She put her hands around her mouth and yelled so that her voice reached him.

"You just lost a hell of a lot of poooooooiiiiinnnnttttssss!!"

"Well, sorry!! I just have to chase after her, right!?"

Kamijou ran after Lessar with slight tears in the corners of his eyes due to fear of the raining glass.

Part 15

Agnese Sanctis was in Scotland.

She was at a yacht harbor in the large city of Edinburgh. The yacht harbor was inside a bay and its location prevented many large waves from reaching it, making it useful for leaving yachts or cruisers for long periods of time.

Agnese was on a boat, but she was not on the water.

There was a large open area of asphalt in front of the yacht harbor. Cruisers worn from wind and rain were lined up there. They had been set up on the land because they could no longer float in the sea due to having holes worn in them.

Most of them were there temporarily waiting to be disassembled or waiting for repairs after being bought by people who couldn't afford a new one.

"So this is the third place," said Lucia, one of Agnese's colleagues. "It can't be used in the water anymore, but the living space has been repaired. It also has the same security as the other two hideouts. It definitely is one of New Light's bases."

Agnese narrowed her eyes.

The majority of modern day "advanced wizards" did not build extravagant castles or towers. If you focused all your power in one place, you would lose everything if that place was searched. As such, they would instead prepare numerous places that could be easily abandoned such as an apartment, a rented

room, or an RV. Splitting up one's assets into smaller areas lowered the risk of losing everything.

This implied something about New Light.

Basically, they were not just a group that had an interest in love fortunes. Instead, they had real power as a magic cabal.

(What a pain in the ass enemy…)

Agnese sighed and then spoke to Lucia.

"Was there any information left inside? Was there anything about the details of the cases they're using, the Skíðblaðnir, or on their plan that involves using those cases?"

"As before, it seems to have been set up so that all the information sources inside could be erased remotely with a single signal. Sisters Catarina and Agata are currently doing a thorough check inside."

"Sister Agnese."

The hatch installed directly on the cruiser's floor opened. A nun with glasses, Agata, stuck her head out and beckoned at Agnese.

"We have found a prototype of the case in the engine room. The fact that the spiritual item was not destroyed more or less confirms that they erased the information remotely and didn't come by themselves. This also points to the possibility that some irregularity caused New Light to start this plan of theirs sooner than they had originally intended."

"So what are the effects of the case – of Skíðblaðnir – as a spiritual item?"

"I can't guarantee that this is correct because we have no actual proof, but I have done a certain level of analysis on it." Agata flipped through a notepad. "It most likely teleports the item inside Case A to Case B, Case C, Case D, or any other related spiritual item. Its effective range is about 100 kilometers. If they're within that range, they can 'pass' the item around as they please."

"I see. So they're attacking London while passing some important item around

between the 4 of them like they were playing lacrosse."

They didn't know what that important item was, but it was something worth preparing those cases for. It was unlikely to be "important" in a good way.

"It could be a bomb or something that could be used as a weapon."

"Yes, we need to look into that."

Two of the four members of New Light had already been taken out by the Amakusas. However, since they could pass around the contents of the Skíðblaðnirs, it was highly likely that any one of them could activate the contents.

Agnese took a report handed to her by another nun, Angelene.

"According to the other two hideouts we found, New Light seems to have excavated something near Edinburgh. That was most likely this important item."

"Sister Agnese! Emergency!!" said Catarina loudly opening the door connecting to the living area. Agnese looked over and Catarina threw a rolled up piece of parchment at her. After spreading it out, Agnese's shoulders jumped in shock.

"…You've got to be kidding me…"

Part 16

Kamijou Touma ran down an alley.

He started wondering what he would do if Lessar made another astounding jump, but it seemed something wasn't going right for her either. Even if she had cushioned herself with the decorated trees, she hadn't been able to land

unscathed after falling from a building.

Currently, she was running down the back alley like a normal person with her tail made of a metal backbone within a clear tube swaying back and forth. That said, she was much faster than a normal girl. She was like a short distance sprinter maintaining her speed over the course of a marathon.

It must have taken Oriana some time to get down from the building because she wasn't nearby.

If he lost sight of her here, it would really be over.

Every time Lessar disappeared around a corner, Kamijou's anxiety spiked. Suddenly, he heard his cell phone ringing. Looking at the screen, he saw a number he was unfamiliar with. In fact, the leading numbers hinted that it wasn't a call from anyone in Japan.

He pressed the connect button while running and he heard a familiar female voice.

"You answered! Thank God! I was right to ask for your information from the Amakusas!!"

"Agnese…?"

(Wait, why do the Amakusa's know my phone number?)

Despite Kamijou's question, Agnese's voice sounded pressured enough that he doubted she would welcome an unnecessary question.

"We know a portion of New Light's objective! Their final target is one of the British princesses heading to the Folkestone terminal in order to investigate the Eurotunnel!!"

"Seriously…?"

Kamijou's body stiffened in shock.

"For diplomatic reasons, there are no magical security measures used on Buckingham Palace, but it is still heavily guarded by a large number of knights,

magicians, and – most importantly – the queen herself. Now that the princesses have left the palace in a carriage, New Light has a great opportunity!!”

The assassination of a British princess.

A chill ran down Kamijou’s back.

“And that isn’t the only problem. The Royal Family ‘officially’ denies it, but the existence of Curtana Second gives me reason to worry. There is a certain large-scale spell that uses a member of the Royal Family as an activation key.”

The Royal Family Agnese mentioned wasn’t just an issue of bloodline. It apparently referred to someone magically inserted into the framework of the Royal Family. Due to political marriages, the British Royal Family possessed connections to the leaders of a number of countries, so it wasn’t something that could merely be explained as “people of the bloodline of the English monarch”.

If bloodline were all that determined whether someone was of the Royal Family or not, a princess from another country that became part of the Royal Family by marrying the king would then be the only person unable to use the magic of the Royal Family.

“There are many rumors about magic that uses a member of the Royal Family as an activation key, but the most extreme is a large-scale spell that activates on the death of a member of the Royal Family.”

“What…?”

“It really is just a rumor, but, simply put, it is an attack spell that creates destruction on a national level. It was supposedly deployed during the 16th century and, of course, the enemies it was targeted at were the other European countries. If it were to be activated, it is said that entire area would be completely blown away.”

There was no longer any sense of reality to Agnese’s words. She went on to say that it was possible that the rumor was merely exaggerated, but that wasn’t much consolation to Kamijou.

“But if that ridiculously powerful spell were activated, it would cause a change in the earth’s crust and cause other natural disasters within England, too. It

would literally be a ‘final attack’, so the aftermath wasn’t considered at all. You could say it’s something like firing an insanely powerful magnum with only one hand. This is all just a rumor, but it is said that most of the people living in the UK would be killed by the recoil and the aftermath.”

If that information were true, then New Light’s true objective was…

“One of the New Light members told me something about someone who wouldn’t put his life on the line for the UK not being qualified to join in this fight.”

“From that, it seems that they really are thinking of assassinating a princess and that they are serious about the magic that would be caused by the death of a member of the Royal Family.”

Another chill ran down Kamijou’s spine and he hurriedly said something to Agnese.

“Wait a second. The British Royal Family has been continuing on for hundreds of years, right? A number of kings and queens would have died during that time. If this large-scale spell actually existed, wouldn’t the UK and the rest of Europe have been wiped out ages ago!?”

“In the Christian church we have what are known as the last rites. Simply put, it is a type of ceremony that prepares the dead for the final judgment allowing them to reach heaven. It’s possible that they applied some kind of code that avoided such a disaster then. Historically, royalty who died within the castle or were executed all had their last rites performed. However, if a sudden death in battle or an assassination succeeded and there wasn’t enough time to carry out the last rites…”

“The spell only applying to the Royal Family would activate…”

The death of a king was the death of the country.

Even if it was a final attack that gathered up all of one’s strength, you should get revenge.

It was a piece of magic left over from an age when people truly believed that. And it was still functioning.

Kamijou shuddered at the mere thought of it.

He desperately searched for something that allowed him to deny it.

New Light had placed a spiritual item that acted as a transmitter on the carriage for the Royal Family.

But that didn't mean they would succeed in the assassination right away.

"That's right. The princesses didn't go out there unarmed! I don't know if it's the usual for heads of state, but the cars and airplanes the president uses are specially made, right!?"

"It's true that that carriage is known as the Travelling Fortress because of all the different forms of security built into it. But it seems the transmitter they put on it doesn't just tell them its location. It also tells them whether the door is open or not."

"So they can attack when one of the princesses is getting out of the carriage?" As Kamijou muttered those words, he felt a cold shiver run down his spine. "Don't they have guards with them!?"

"Of course they do, but they're guarding based on the assumption that the carriage's defenses are functioning properly. If that turned out not to be true, there would be a hole in their security. If a long distance attack was used through that gap…"

"Fuck," Kamijou spat out. "How did something like a transmitter get on a royal carriage anyway?"

"We don't know exactly how. Also, since a transmitter was put on, we can't deny the possibility of something else having been done to it. For example, they could have done something that temporarily weakens the magical defenses on the carriage."

"…This is horrible," Kamijou groaned.

Index would be on that carriage along with the princesses.

"We still don't know how they plan on attacking. London could merely be

nothing more than a shortcut to the terminal in Folkestone or they may be able to use some kind of long distance attack. Either way, you need to restrain the remaining members as soon as possible!”

Kamijou glared at the fleeing back of Lessar.

“There’s still a member we haven’t found, right!?”

“New Light is made up of 4 members and two have already been defeated. That leaves the one you are chasing and another one we don’t know the whereabouts of. Given the characteristics of Skíðblaðnir we just discovered, their actions will be more limited if they are alone.”

Agnese explained the effects of the rectangular case that was a spiritual item known as Skíðblaðnir. It seemed the contents could be freely moved from Case A to Case B.

“There are only two of them left. One of those cases must contain whatever it is. But…”

Even if Lessar had the contents, she would just “pass” whatever it was to the final member if she were cornered.

In other words…

“It’s true that the final one won’t be able to pass it on, but that isn’t enough to ensure this assassination won’t happen!! As long as they have whatever is in there, I get the feeling that any one of them could carry out a fatal attack!!”

“Yes. We cannot relax until each and every one of them has been found and restrained. So hurry!”

Kamijou hung up his phone, stuck it in his pocket, and focused his attention forward once more.

Lessar turned around a corner, but when Kamijou followed, she had disappeared.

(!?)

For a second his heart almost stopped, but he quickly figured out what had

happened.

There was an emergency staircase stretching up a building to the side.

Kamijou looked up and heard a metallic clanging coming from the metal staircase.

“So she went up.”

He regulated his breathing and started up the stairs. The building was about 5 stories tall. The door on the 4th floor was open. Looking at each landing as he went back and forth up the stairs, he headed straight for that door.

He then heard a metallic noise and saw four shining silver blades.

Lessar had jammed the blades into the space between the metal emergency staircase and the brick wall and she forcefully cut the connector.

“You’re kidding!!”

With one of the bolts cut, the entire staircase wobbled. The sudden weight caused a bolt on a different floor to break like a shirt button popping off. Kamijou immediately grabbed the handrail, but the entire staircase tilted. It wasn’t going to last much longer.

The entire staircase was tilted at about 15 degrees when it suddenly stopped. Looking up, Kamijou saw that the top of the staircase had hit the building on the other side of the alley due to the alleyway being fairly narrow.

“…!!”

Seeing that, Lessar started to attack with the steel glove again.

However, Kamijou moved before she could. He ignored the normal stairway, stood up on the handrail, and jumped up to the 4th floor where Lessar was. When he did, the bent staircase started to collapse and fall down under its own weight.

“Why you…!!”

As Kamijou approached, Lessar stabbed with the steel glove.

But there was one thing she didn’t know.

A power known as Imagine Breaker resided in his right hand.

“Ooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

As the staircase fell, Kamijou’s fist swung down striking the top of Lessar’s steel glove. The four blades shattered. Before Lessar could respond in shock to that, she was forced into a collision with Kamijou.

Behind her, she heard the sound of the staircase completely collapsing.

Kamijou lost his balance and fell to the floor and he stood up again breathing heavily.

In front of him, Lessar was refusing to let go of the rectangular case despite having lost her weapon. That case was Skíðblaðnir, the spiritual item that allowed her to freely pass around its contents.

Lessar looked around the area searching for an escape path, but Kamijou spoke cutting into her search.

“It’s over.”

“…”

“You no longer have the power to quickly run away like you had at the beginning. And you’ve also lost that weird spear-like weapon that gave you ridiculous strength. Right now, I could easily beat you down with my fists.”

Lessar was still staring towards the elevator refusing to give up, but then Oriana appeared having run over hearing the noise.

Lessar’s escape routes were cut off on both sides and she sighed slightly.

She then threw open a nearby door and jumped inside. However, there was no exit that way. Kamijou and Oriana nodded at each other and followed her inside.

It seemed to be a multi-tenant building and the rooms had been made into

offices. The building itself was stylishly made of brick, so the stereotypical desks and office copy machines that were almost enshrined within it seemed a bit surreal.

Lessar was at a window.

However, she could not jump down. She knew that if she did, she wouldn't get out of it uninjured.

"We know what you're after," Kamijou said. "It seems you're aiming for the princesses while they're away from Buckingham Palace, but it appears you've failed. The others have been captured, too."

Lessar gave a slight laugh upon hearing Kamijou's words.

She responded to him in Japanese.

"But you don't know where Lancis is, do you?"

"…"

"The reason is simple enough. Lancis isn't in London."

A chill ran down Kamijou's spine.

He imagined that a member of New Light had already made it through London and was headed to Folkestone where the princesses were.

But it seemed that wasn't what Lessar had meant.

"Lancis is waiting in a place 30 kilometers north of London. The rest of us were merely relay points. We just had to adjust our locations to match up with the location of the royal carriage. If any one of the three of us here acts as a relay point, *our plan will succeed*."

"What are you saying…?"

Kamijou frowned doubtfully, but that was when Oriana looked up as if she had realized something. Her instincts as a courier must have told her something.

"A relay point…? You don't mean…!!"

Oriana quickly pulled out her booklet of flashcards, but Lessar just laughed.

“When you figured out that we had mass produced them, why didn’t you realize that there could be five Skíðblaðnirs!?”

Lessar tilted the rectangular case to the side by quite a bit.

What looked like a blue laser shot into it ignoring the presence of the walls. The light then changed directions as if it had been refracted and shot off for some other destination.

According to Agnese, Skíðblaðnir had an effective range of 100 kilometers. It could reach Folkestone from there.

However…

(…That Lancis person clearly sent the contents here.)

“Who did you send the contents to? Who has the 5th case!?”

Kamijou instinctually tried to grab the case, but Lessar threw it to the side since she didn’t need it anymore and spread her arms wide. Kamijou looked on in puzzlement and she spoke.

“I’ve completed my objective, but it’s true that I lost this battle. I guess causing even more trouble for you all and the Forward after such a boring result wouldn’t be right since we’ve allied with you.” Her smile turned to a look of resignation. “I’ll take it. If you’re going to silence me, do it now.”

Kamijou saw a spot in the night landscape outside the window flash.

He immediately jumped forward to pull Lessar out of the way, but something happened when he grabbed her arm.

The window behind Lessar shattered and something red spurted out.

“A sniper!?” yelled Oriana.

Kamijou wasn’t even pulled down with her. Lessar merely spun around from the blow and struck the floor. Perhaps because he had grabbed her arm, the aim had

been off just slightly. Whatever had struck her shoulder had almost torn her arm off. It must have broken an artery because an unbelievable amount of blood was flowing out.

“You idiot! Get down!!”

Despite being yelled at, Kamijou couldn’t move.

Lessar had said she was being “silenced”.

If that were true, this wasn’t someone coming to help Kamijou and Oriana.

That attack had clearly been intended to kill Lessar.

“Dammit!!”

Finally able to move, Kamijou looked around the area and found a bundle of copy paper. He balled it up and pressed it against the wound. Probably because of all the blood she had lost, Lessar had begun to convulse slightly. She was going into shock.

She would be in serious trouble at that rate.

“Call an ambulance, Oriana!! No, wait. Is there any healing magic you can use!?”

“Unfortunately, no,” Oriana said regretfully.

Then she froze in place.

The object that had broken the window and pierced Lessar’s shoulder had stuck into a steel office desk. It was an odd projectile made up of a streamlined arrowhead stuck onto a pole about 30 cm long.

Oriana was not shocked by how much destructive force it had.

She was shocked because she recognized it.

“…Robin Hood…”

“What!?”

“It’s a long-distance sniping spiritual item used by the knights. But the Anglican Church was supposed to be in control of magical incidents within the country. I hadn’t heard anything about the knights helping out with this.”

Oriana pulled the projectile out of the steel desk.

She traced its surface with a fingertip.

“Robin Hood was developed for military purposes by a famous unit under direct control of Second Princess Carissa. If that unit is involved in the silencing of New Light…It couldn’t be…!”

As Oriana responded in shock, Kamijou’s body stiffened.

He stiffened because of Lessar.

Her wound was being held down by a large amount of copy paper and she moved her shaking lips to speak either to brag about her success or in thanks for the emergency treatment he had given her.

“…We were transporting Curtana Original…”

A smile appeared on her bloody face.

“That’s the ceremonial sword that was once used for coronations and the Sword of Mercy that can only be used by the Royal Family. …Of course…it greatly outdoes the Curtana Second…that was created later and the current queen possesses it. It is the UK’s greatest spiritual item… It is truly the proper sword with which to change the country…”

Part 17

Folkestone was a port town about 100 kilometers from London. In that city was the terminal to the Eurotunnel, the undersea tunnel that cut across the Strait of Dover.

Innumerable carriages were stopped near the terminal that was wrapped in darkness. They were the carriage for the Royal Family and the ones guarding it. A number of military horses along with a few dozen knights wearing silver armor were waiting there as well.

There was no light in the entrance.

As the undersea tunnel had been destroyed in an explosion partway through, the terminal was not operating. Index was headed towards it. A bit away, a young maid was handing a thermos of tea to Third Princess Villian.

That was when Knight Leader's eyebrows twitched.

He looked down at the rectangular case he was holding.

He checked the weight of the case and then moved silently over to the second princess. Still holding the case, he whispered in Carissa's ear.

"It has arrived."

"I see."

Second Princess Carissa gave a slight nod.

Knight Leader continued speaking so that no one else could hear.

"From our monitoring of electronic and magical communications, it seems the church mistakenly believes that New Light intends to activate a large-scale anti-European attack spell by assassinating a princess."

"Hah. And yet that ridiculous legend isn't even true."

"If we really had such destructive magic, the negotiations would have gone much more easily. And more than anything, we would simply need a plan to ensure that the people weren't killed so easily."

Carissa moved her right arm so as to quiet the man and her smile deepened.

“Convey this to the knights hidden all across the country.”

That was the sign.

That single command would burn a nation down from the inside.

“Begin the invasion. I now have Curtana Original, the sword that decides the king, within my grasp. This makes me, Carissa, the ruler of the United Kingdom. Anyone that does not want to see the country decay under the rule of the previous pacifist queen, stand up of your own will. To bring about the new United Kingdom, leveling some things will be necessary and some destruction will be necessary.”

Chapter 4: The Sword that Brings War and Disaster. *Sword_of_Mercy.*

Part 1

Midnight.

As the date changed, various things happened.

For example, in various cities across Northern Ireland such as Belfast, Enniskillen, and Londonderry, the hospitals, police stations, and other major facilities were blockaded by a large number of policemen and soldiers. They were all people who were supporting either the knights or the second princess faction of the Royal Family. The normal people either stayed indoors out of fear of the unusual atmosphere or their curiosity spurred them to head outside to see what was going on. The latter group was arrested by the police.

For example, a mint that created a currency exclusive to Scotland, the Holyrood Palace that acted as a religious base, and other facilities in Scotland were invaded and occupied by the guards and knights that were supposed to be protecting them. The former Agnese Forces who had been investigating at a yacht harbor in Edinburgh were surrounded by an overwhelming number of knights.

For example, Cardiff Castle, Swansea Castle, Oystermouth Castle, Conwy Castle, Penrhyn Castle, Beaumaris Castle, Caernarfon Castle, and every kind of fortress in Wales fell one after another at the hands of the knights. Needless to say, the local assembly and courthouses were taken as well.

For example, the knights' grasp reached London, the center of England, and the nearby cities. Of course, England had more knights in it to begin with. They set foot in important religious locations such as St. George's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey and they set foot in important political locations such as Buckingham Palace and parliament.

Of course, the magicians of the Anglican Church in Necessarius did not allow this invasion to commence with no resistance.

Wales had a great number of castles and fortresses. The stone-made military structures had been built by many different people for many different reasons. Some had been created as bases to use in an attack on that land. Some had been created as a fortress to protect that land. However, at that point, they were all under the control of a single faction.

Namely, the knights.

"Ah….Dammit!!"

A nun ran through the darkness completely out of breath.

She had been entrusted by the knights to run a chapel installed within a fortress. When that invasion had begun due to Second Princess Carissa obtaining Curtana Original, nuns assigned to the fortresses and therefore separated from the main body of the Anglican Church had been in the worst position. It had been as if everyone around her had turned their weapons on her at once.

(What is wrong with the knights to have them turn their weapons on me!?)

She was at a distinct disadvantage due to numbers alone.

To turn the situation around, she first had to gather enough people to fight as an organization.

(Dammit. I might have been able to do something if it had just been one on one…!!)

The nun clicked her tongue as she ran.

She didn't mean that she would have been able to kill a fully equipped knight. As long as they were in the United Kingdom, the knights wielded a portion of the power of an angel by borrowing the power of Curtana Original, so she had no intention of fighting one head on.

Even so, if she used her magic to its fullest, she could have at least bought herself some time. She could have at least managed a smoke screen or distraction. But that was only against a single knight.

After all, the way she would buy herself some time would be to seal the enemy's movements for a short period of time. If another enemy showed up while the first couldn't move, the first would be able to move again by the time she had sealed the movements of the new enemy. Getting caught in a loop like that would be meaningless.

(Anyway, I need to meet up with the nuns in the other fortresses! If we can work together, we can make this an organization vs. an organization! At the very least, we should be able to use our numbers to retreat more effectively!!)

Suddenly, a suit of silver armor appeared from the side. It was a pursuing knight. It seemed he had been ordered to capture her not kill her, but she had no proof she would be safe after having been captured.

"!!"

The nun pulled a compass from her sleeve.

Her spells were greatly affected by direction. She threw a single card in the direction the compass told her was north. A ball of light started to come from it, but…

(It…didn’t come out…!?)

Her face stiffened. Her spell had failed. She thought about why that could be and she realized that it was possible the power that caused the compass needle to move – that is, magnetism – was being interfered with by an external force.

In other words, the direction the compass had indicated was north was not actually north.

She had assumed it was and thrown her card in that direction, so there was no way her spell would have worked.

“Not good…”

Noticing the time lag from the failed spell, the silver armored arm of the knight approached.

In the Atlantic Ocean near the island of Islay, a fortress floated up 20 meters from the jet black waters.

The mobile fortress was named Coven Compass and it was a giant disk made of stone with a diameter of 200 meters and thickness of 10 meters. As if to express why it was called a compass, the top of the disk had sharp lines running in each direction from the center, but that was not the main focus of the fortress.

On the bottom side dozens even hundreds of ropes were hanging down loosely and a witch carrying a broomstick was sitting on each one. They almost looked like migratory birds taking a short rest, but they were all preparing for battle.

Their old worn out broomsticks had a certain type of potion covering them.

The witches were not riding on the broomsticks. They were merely guiding the objects that had been given the ability to fly from the potion. With that potion, they could make other tools fly as well.

(Well, a witch’s potion is just made from different magical plants. We don’t really cook unbaptized babies or anything.)

One of the witches sitting on a rope, Smartvery, gave a light sigh. The same type of witch's potion had been applied to her skin under her clothes and the slimy feeling was a bit uncomfortable.

The operator's voice resounded from the small dome in the center of the bottom side of the fortress which was a communications spiritual item.

"#3 through #20, #30 through #35, and #43 through #52 have completed preparations for firing! The specified witches will accelerate in sequence in order to intercept the knights headed this way!!"

Hearing that, Smartvery adjusted her grip on the broomstick she was holding in one hand, activated some magic with her other hand, and cut the rope she was sitting on.

Immediately afterwards, she started falling due to gravity.

Smartvery grabbed the end of the rope she had cut. Her body had now become the bottom of a giant 20 meter pendulum and she accelerated by swinging back and forth as if on a trapeze. At the very bottom of her arc, the point where she had the greatest amount of power stored up, she let go. The witch straddled the broomstick in midair and cut just above the dark ocean surface at high speed.

Modern witches did not fly through the sky.

Just by praying to the Lord, Peter, one of the Twelve Apostles, had brought down a magician named Simon Magus who was said to have used demonic power to fly. Because the anti-flight spell used in that legend was developed within the Christian Church, the heretical and pagan flight spells that could be explained using Christian doctrines had fallen into a problematic dilemma where flying was easy but being made to fall to the earth was easy as well.

Because of this, modern witches did not fly through the sky. Large structures like the mobile fortress Coven Compass had large walls protecting them from that anti-flight spell, but small witches did not have such protection. This led to flying at low enough altitudes that they were practically travelling across the surface being the standard method of avoiding Peter's anti-flight spell.

As Smartvery soared across the ocean surface, a number of her fellow witches were flying alongside her. The total number of witches flying across the ocean

surface had already exceeded 100.

The witches used communication spiritual items in order to communicate their thoughts at high speed.

“What are we going to do, Smartvery!? We’re more maneuverable, but the knights have more combined attack capability! Those monsters have put reinforcing spiritual items on their armor because their physical strength is so great they would destroy their own magical structures!! And if our information is accurate, they’re receiving Telesma from Curtana Original! We don’t even know if we can fatally wound them with a direct hit!!”

“That Curtana Original works at its maximum within the United Kingdom, right? Although if they’re thinking of invading Europe, they may still be hiding a secret. But at the very least, there’s no sign of them using anything extra here. That makes this simple. We have a mobile fortress, so we just have to escape outside the country and the knights’ power should halve,” Smartvery said in an overly sugary voice to encourage her colleague. “I guess I’m saying we just have to bear with it until Coven Compass makes it outside the national border. The top of the fortress is the firing device for the large-scale flash spell. If we keep fighting and lure the knights outside the country, we can burn all of them away at once.”

“So we’re the lure, huh? Really. It seems knights just love chasing after witch ass no matter the era.”

“That would be the safest plan, but wouldn’t it be fun to take them out with an ocean control spell?”

“Hey, wait a second. Just tell me which one we’re going with!”

At that point, the ocean surface in front of them shook as if to stop the witches from proceeding.

A number of eyeball-like lights glittered eerily from within the dark water.

“Here they come!!” yelled one of the other witches.

Immediately afterwards, a large number of something came flying from the ocean like missiles.

They were the silver armor of the knights.

A lightning-like attack flash leaped from the tips of the spears the many suits of armors held.

As if in response, fire-like lights lit at the end of the witches' broomsticks.

100 vs. 100.

A seemingly infinite number of rays of lights crossed and the battle between the witches and the knights began.

The former Agnese Forces had been investigating New Light at a yacht harbor in Edinburgh, Scotland. The group was a pretty good organization in and of itself with over 250 members.

They were currently surrounded by an even greater number of knights.

"…There are more than 700 people here altogether. Normally, the police would be charging over because of an unauthorized demonstration. I had always thought they were rather nasty, but I never expected them to be this arrogant," said Agnese in a low voice as she held up her silver Lotus Wand.

Lucia stood back-to-back with her holding a large wooden wheel in both hands.

"There is no sign of a people clearing field having been set up and they don't seem to be worried about it, so the knights must really have invaded a large area."

"I-I'm worried about London too since we can't seem to contact them," whispered Angelene while 4 gold coin bags floated around her.

As the nuns prepared for battle, one of the knights walked forward and spoke.

"We were instructed to do as little killing as possible, but we cannot ensure that if this many people were to clash. Even if we were not intending to kill, there would still be a risk of people being crushed by the sheer pressure."

“So you’re telling us to surrender before anyone gets hurt? How kind of you.”

“…Do not blame us if there are any casualties.”

The knight brought up his sword and Agnese smiled fearlessly.

As she smiled, she struck the ground at her feet with the Lotus Wand.

Focusing on that spot without thinking was a mistake on the part of the knights.

An explosive flash surged from that spot.

The bright light only took away their vision for about 5 seconds.

However, once the light was gone, the nuns were gone, too.

Every single one of the 250 nuns had disappeared.

“What…?”

The knights’ eyes blinked within their helmet and they looked around the area, but they couldn’t spot a single trace of the nuns. They exchanged signs and spread out to search for the nuns.

“Wow. I’m surprised that worked,” muttered Agnese after the knights left.

A dripping noise could be heard around her.

“…Well, I will admit that the color black acted as a protective color in this environment.”

“D-did we really have to jump into the ocean so suddenly?”

Lucia seemed rather calm for being in the ocean towards the end of October and Angelene’s teeth were chattering. Only those three were in the ocean, the other nuns had ran and hid in whatever place came to mind for them.

Agnese grabbed onto the concrete bank and slowly crawled up. Her soaking wet nun’s habit turned cold as soon as it touched the air.

“If the knights are acting so openly, I’d say it’s safe to assume Edinburgh has already fallen.”

“Wh-what are we going to do now?” asked Angelene as Agnese grabbed the bent-backed girl’s hand from on top of the bank.

Lucia responded as she climbed up on her own to the side.

“We can’t contact London, so we have no choice but to act on our own. Sister Agnese, how many people in the unit do you reckon we can actually use?”

“…Well, we did split up and flee, but most of us will likely be caught by the knights.”

“No!!” Angelene yelled, but Agnese brought her index finger up to her lips.

“Their leader, Second Princess Carissa, will most likely be in England. It’s quite likely the captured nuns will be taken there. That also means that they will arrive safely in England even if they are caught.”

“So you’re saying we can just rescue the captured nuns while they are being transported. They worked for our freedom, so we need to respond by working our hardest for them.”

Agnese, Lucia, and Angelene nodded silently in the yacht harbor late at night.

“First of all, let’s do something about these wet clothes.”

Second Princess Carissa and the knights’ rebellion spread throughout the United Kingdom.

For Necessarius, the fight was not one of having the church and the knights clash and continue to fight until one of the sides was defeated. After receiving the knights’ sudden surprise attack, the Anglican Church had decided not to waste unnecessary strength by forcibly bringing back their normal conditions. Instead, they were preserving their strength and waiting for a chance to strike back.

The church knew they would lose if it came to a simple comparison of power, so

they had taken the truly important items from the churches and cathedrals and gathered together to speedily evacuate while putting up local resistance.

The knights and the church were both one of the factions making up the country. However, the knights now had a higher rank within the United Kingdom. Within the country, the queen was recognized as the leader of the angels and the knights following her were recognized as angels.

The church was using normal magic and the knights had the power of the angels, so they would surely wipe each other out if they had a full-on confrontation. And it was even possible that the church would be defeated.

Due to this, the magicians were disappearing into the night and waiting for a good opportunity.

And…

The queen and the Archbishop were within Windsor Castle, a certain magical fortress on the outskirts of London. Elizard was drinking tea and Laura Stewart's glass held mineral water.

They were the only people there.

The double doors leading into the room they were in were magically locked. It was an extremely high level lock worthy of guarding the Royal Family.

(…Well, it probably won't last 30 seconds before it's broken from the outside.)

Laura Stewart had a reason for that insecure thought.

She could see the light of a great number of torches outside the window.

She could hear thunderous footsteps travelling through the castle.

They most likely belonged to people who had left the leadership of the queen. No matter how strong the protective structures were, they weren't much help now that the knights, the ones who were supposed to be operating those structures, had betrayed her. About the only people within the castle who still

held loyalty for the queen were the gardeners, maids, and other workers who were not part of the Royal Family or the knights.

Elizard and Laura had noticed the change when the date had changed, but they hadn't had time to flee. They had only managed to lock the door, but that would only delay the inevitable.

"…Really now." Laura swished the clear liquid within her glass around and sighed. "And I summoned Index Librorum Prohibitorum here in order to analyze the princesses' actions and see if they posed any threats before they could do anything. Since the knights are so involved, I suppose this was the second princess. She made her move sooner than I expected."

"Yes. She may be my daughter, but this was a splendidly swift tactic. She truly does have talent for that kind of thing."

"How about you stop taking pride in your daughter when she's about to strangle you? So what are you going to do? You still have the power of Curtana Second, right?"

"Only about a fifth of it. The rest was taken by Curtana Original."

The queen looked over at a sword with no blade and no tip that was at her side.

"If we fought now, Curtana Second would be cut in two. This one was a makeshift version made as a replacement for the Original when it was lost, so the power wasn't really taken away so much as it was returned to its rightful place. It was unnatural for the power to be in my sword." Elizard tapped the side of the sword with her index finger and her voice turned somewhat cheerful. "But she really did well to excavate the Original. In the hundreds of years since it was lost in that revolution, the successive kings and queens have attempted to search for it, but they never even found a hint. Come to think of it, New Light specializes in Norse spells, don't they? In that case, they may have used a spell for searching for gold veins that had been passed down in relation to the Dvergr. At any rate, now that Curtana Original has been brought back, I have no hope of winning if it comes down to a swordfight."

"Ha ha ha. You piece of shit."

Just when Laura was thinking of throwing her water on the queen, the large

doors opened wide without even a knock. The magical lock had been destroyed as the door was opened. About a dozen fully equipped knights entered with their swords already drawn. It went beyond the realm of bad manners and into the realm of a mugging.

One of the knights spoke.

“The major institutions of London as well as the rest of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have been captured by us knights. In other words, we have taken most of the bases of the Royal Family and the church and have succeeded in sealing almost all of their functionality.”

“I see. So you’ve dyed the entirety of the United Kingdom in the color of the knights led by Carissa. This didn’t become a tempest of decapitations and bloodshed because the already delicate 3 faction, 4 culture system of the United Kingdom would resist you all at once if you carried out the executions before you had established your new order on the country with Curtana Original. If that happened, there was a risk that the framework of the country itself would be destroyed.”

The knight nodded slightly in response to Elizard’s words.

It seemed that as long as the queen did not try to cut the knights down they still held a certain amount of respect for her despite opposing her.

“If you do not resist, you will not be needlessly harmed. Please wisely choose the path that avoids any unnecessary bloodshed.”

“You must have it tough,” said Queen Elizard with a sigh of exasperation despite having the tip of a sword pointed at her. “That isn’t Carissa’s way of doing things. If you don’t accurately pass on what she said, she won’t be happy.”

“…”

“I’m sure my daughter’s order was something like this: Tell her to surrender in as businesslike a way as you can and if she doesn’t, kill her. Also…I know. She would tell you to show no mercy if you determined you had to kill me and to swiftly kill me even if it meant getting civilian gardeners or other workers wrapped up in it. I’m sure she said at least that much.”

A slight creaking noise came from the armor on the back of the knight’s hand.

The assassin of a knight tightened his grip on his sword and squeezed out a voice.

“…Hand over Curtana Second and come under our supervision. …You too, church woman.”

“Heh heh. I lead one of the three factions just like the queen, but you certainly treat me differently.”

“We could just cut you down here. We are being merciful.”

Laura’s expression did not change in response to the knight’s threat. As she watched the queen put Curtana Second in a scabbard prepared by the knight, she seemed calm.

Laura smiled and spoke to her old friend Elizard.

“So, what are we going to do?”

Part 2

Index was inside the Eurotunnel running below the Strait of Dover where the explosion had occurred.

A railway ran beneath her feet.

The large terminal that acted as an entrance for the Eurotunnel was located in Folkestone, a city a bit away from Dover.

A large number of rail lines gathered there and were redistributed into the 3

undersea tunnels.

Index stepped into one of the 3 tunnels.

The tunnel actually ran a few kilometers before heading into the sea, but Index stopped after heading only about 20 meters down from the tunnel entrance. The path was surrounded by iron and concrete, but it suddenly ended. She was actually a good distance away from where the tunnel had been broken, but the sea water that had poured in had come all the way there because that location was lower than ground level.

The Eurotunnel had been thoroughly split in three by explosions in two different places.

Due to that dark sea water that seemed to be sucking in the darkness, the actual point of the explosions couldn't be reached.

Index spoke while looking at the sea water cutting off the tunnel.

"A Roman Catholic spell based on the legend of the House of Loreto was used as a symbol of destruction."

The Virgin Mary was said to have lived in a certain house in a certain city in Italy. The house was famous for disappearing on its own and appearing on its own and the legend said that the house had teleported twice in the past.

"However, it looks like the spell to 'move a building' had an incomplete effect on the tunnel. A single portion 'moved' unnaturally which cracked the tunnel."

"I see."

"The original House of Loreto is famous for having been visited by the French king Louis IX. He most likely made a fragmentary analysis of it then and brought the theory of the spiritual item back to France. Someone must have used that to carry out this tunnel explosion. I can see some descriptors scattered about the spell that were changed to make it travel to France."

"That pretty much confirms that this was done by a French Roman Catholic faction," said Second Princess Carissa with a smile. She then looked down to the ground. "Not just a French-made spell, but a spell that was related to an analysis

done by their Royal Family. Their magicians wouldn't be able to use that. We should assume that a unit under direct control of their head group was involved."

"We can't be sure of that. The French monarchy was ended long ago, so a spell related to a former king wouldn't necessarily have connections to the current political power."

"The cornerstone of the brains that control the current ruling political power there is an aggregation of strategists and tacticians taught by the knowledge of the historical kings. It wouldn't be surprising if that unofficial collection of brains had treasure from the royal palace."

Carissa stopped speaking for a second and looked Index in the face when she spoke again.

"But I'm truly glad."

"?"

"For me, there's no problem as long as this is determined to have been done by France. As long as you didn't say that France had nothing to do with this, there was no problem. So let me say it again: I'm truly glad. If you hadn't given me the answer I wanted, *I would have had to kill you here*."

"!?"

Index put herself on guard while seeing a smile spread across Carissa's face.

But there was only a submerged tunnel behind her. She had nowhere to run.

That was when the head of the knights, Knight Leader, arrived.

The man who was supposed to be guarding the princess and Index was holding an old rectangular case in his hand.

"Release Skíðblaðnir. I want to check on the sword before we end up in a full-blown war."

The second princess held out a hand and Knight Leader unlocked the rectangular case.

The wooden mosaic-like structure on the surface of the case moved complicatedly, expanded, and changed into a giant canoe. A sword in a scabbard lay within the boat.

Carissa grabbed the scabbard, pulled out a sword with no tip or blade, and laughed.

“Curtana Original…” Carissa lightly waved the sword like a conductor’s baton in front of Index who didn’t really understand what was going on. “Since I hate the traditions of England, I really should just go ahead and break it now, but I’ll use it while it’s still useful to me.”

“You now have established your sovereignty over the entirety of the United Kingdom. Your words already represent the intentions of the country, but how about you make a declaration to France?”

“Just report to them what Index Librorum Prohibitorum said. Oh, and add on a final notification. This country did manage to compile those 103,000 grimoires, so it makes sense to use them for the country’s benefit.”

Index glared back in response to Carissa’s words.

The second princess ignored her and spoke to Knight Leader.

“The Royal Family and the knights can indirectly pressure the military into acting, right? Have them deploy a destroyer into the Strait of Dover. Make it so we can fire a missile into Versailles depending on their answer.”

“We can have the military act, but shouldn’t we give some thought to Academy City and the science side?”

“Ignore them,” was Carissa’s simple answer. “Our country should hold the reins of its own military power. Being influenced by other countries isn’t right.”

“Understood.”

That decision threatened the extremely tenuous connection between Academy City and the Anglican Church, but Carissa didn’t seem to care. Knight Leader decided not to comment on it.

“But is targeting that palace really the best idea? I have heard that the current political power of France is controlled in the shadows by a group of strategists who have no specific base and who intentionally avoid forming an organization.”

“Yes, but it’s a fact that the woman who possesses the greatest intellect among the strategists is hiding there. If we blow her away, the others will realize that a pathetic hideout will do them no good because we’ll just blow away the entire city.”

“What kind of warhead should we use?”

“Use the bunker cluster ones that was developed using technology original to England. That warhead spreads out around 200 special smaller shells that are made to pierce a shelter 50 meters underground. That will turn the entire city block that palace is on to Swiss cheese.”

“…Might I remind you that that would be in violation of the treaty we have banning cluster bombs?”

Second Princess Carissa laughed.

“The English military authorities never intended to sign that treaty. It was forced on us with pressure from France and the other EU nations. But this is actually perfect timing. We need to check over all the treaties we have with other countries and annul all the unnecessary ones. We can start with the bunker cluster one. The EU is just a bunch of countries influenced by the Roman Catholic Church anyway. This is an excellent opportunity to cut our ties with them.”

“…”

“We can also do away with our backing from America related to the dollar. Let’s wipe the slate clean regarding the interactions my mother carried out.” She remained silent for a short time. “The Anglican Church and Academy City vs. the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church? What kind of war is that? Whether the magic side or the science side wins, England is done for. If the Roman Catholic Church wins, they’ll go right ahead and destroy us. And even if Academy City wins, a magical country like England will be isolated within a world ruled by science. A war that leaves us no path but to become a

dependency is meaningless.”

“And that’s what your declaration of intentions is for?”

“Yes. To avoid becoming a dependency in the future, acting after the war is over is too late. We of course need to brush away the strength of Rome and Russia, but we also need to cut our ties with Academy City. If we don’t change this war from being a conflict between two sides to being a three-sided war with England isolated, we have no future. That’s what the proclamation is for. Using the destroyer will cut our ties with Academy City and the bunker cluster will stop the interference from the EU and the rest of Europe. Isolation is the sole path that will save England.”

“Isolating ourselves from the EU could devastate the economy and lead to a lack of resources. With the cutting off of supply routes from the Eurotunnel bombing and the hijacking, we’re already in bad shape. How can you think of making that worse?”

“It’s true that there will be disorder for a bit.” Carissa did not deny that possibility. “But victory in this war that will shake the world will greatly change the makeup of the world. By driving all Roman Catholic control from Europe and creating a structure centered around England, the problems surrounding the economy and resources will be solved. It’s actually quite simple. Just like how America once aimed to police the world and what Japan’s Academy City succeeded on doing in secret, we just have to create a society where England is needed by the rest of the world. Once that happens, no one will let us run out of resources.”

What she was saying wasn’t just a fantasy.

The scale of the war eating into the world bit by bit was already at the level where the victor would be able to take control of the world.

“My mother’s pacifism may have had its merits, but it only works in an era where the world is at peace. She should have been more aware that the problems before her were portions of a war developing on a global scale *even if it didn’t look that way on the surface*.” As Carissa spat out those words, she roughly swung Curtana Original onto her shoulder. “In any case, for the sake of this country’s future, we need to win this war without accepting any cooperation or allowing any interference from others. Sending a destroyer packed with bunker

cluster missiles into the Strait of Dover is the first step towards that end."

"Understood. I will have them make preparations to load the missiles on a destroyer anchored in a naval port."

"If only we had nuclear missiles. I suppose we should develop some once the situation within the country has been sorted out."

"…With all due respect, I would prefer we use something that would not be harmful to those who set foot in the palace after the missile hits."

"Ha ha. But radiation poses no threat to that body of yours. Or are you worried about the foreign citizens? We can send out a warning beforehand. That woman isn't going to leave Versailles even if we do, so I'll allow that much."

"Now then." A bitter smile appeared on Knight Leader's face and he turned towards the bewildered Index. "What about the grimoire library?"

"At the very least, she gives legitimacy to our final warning for France."

"What if her opinion is officially overturned?"

"Due to her perfect memory, she remembers what she said verbatim, so there will be no reason to doubt its authenticity if we have her read back what she said."

Not being part of the discussion, Index took a step back despite knowing it was futile. Her shoes and the bottom of her skirt were already starting to sink into the ocean water.

"Okay, we will go with that for the long term. What should we do in the short term?" asked Knight Leader frankly.

Carissa gave a short laugh.

"Put her to sleep."

Index did not have time to resist.

Knight Leader's fist plowed into her solar plexus.

Part 3

As if the New Light magician Lessar getting shot before Kamijou Touma's eyes had been a signal, the city of London completely changed. Groups all covered in silver armor marched down the streets.

Focused around the Anglican institutions throughout London, intermittent flashes of light and explosive noises continued through the night. Most likely, heavily armed knights were fiercely fighting against priests and nuns at that very moment.

How were normal people who didn't know anything of magic or psychic powers supposed to rationalize what they were seeing?

At the very least, they didn't gather to look on out of curiosity.

The police used their cars to create barricades in the streets to prevent anyone from approaching and they pushed back any citizens who tried to do so. Those who continued to resist were mercilessly held down on the ground and restrained.

"…This is too much for a people clearing field to deal with," muttered Oriana in what was almost a groan while hiding behind the corner of a building. "There are a lot of magical incidents in England in the first place. The church has a number of large-scale cover-up plans prepared to deal with them. If we're beyond that maximum load and at the saturation point, it must mean…"

What the professional magician was saying was actually exceedingly simple.

The knights had almost completely carried out their coup d'état. London, the capital of England, as well as the other major cities had fallen into enemy hands.

“Shit. And I guess an ambulance isn’t going to be coming with all this chaos,” spat out Kamijou in annoyance as he held Lessar unconscious in his arms. “It looks like our only option is to meet up with Necessarius. I’m sure one of them can use healing magic.”

“Yes, but…” Oriana said hesitantly.

Index, who had been travelling with Kamijou up to that point, was in Folkestone carrying out an investigation on the explosion in the Eurotunnel. The people thought to be behind the coup d’état, Second Princess Carissa and Knight Leader, were with her.

Something would happen there.

Kamijou was worried about Index.

“We have to get her healed as soon as we can.” He looked down at Lessar while a distant explosion reached his ears. “We don’t have just one problem to deal with.”

“True…”

Kamijou and Oriana nodded and headed out from behind the building.

They were heading for the Anglican women’s dorm in the Borough of Lambeth.

According to Oriana, most of the Anglican magicians would be buying time with sporadic fighting while gathering up the truly important books, spiritual items, and other items from the churches and other religious institutions and then starting their evacuation. It was unlikely they would find a magician if they headed to an Anglican church.

The main problem was that Oriana was a skilled criminal that was temporarily being used due to a deal she had made.

In other words, she wasn’t trusted enough to have been taught the Anglican Church’s emergency evacuation routes.

“But a rear guard will remain at that women’s dorm as long as possible in order to buy some time to safely hide important documents and spiritual items. If

we’re going to make contact, we’ll have to rely on them.”

However, there was something blocking their path.

It was a large river.

A large river with a width of over 200 meters cut across London east to west. To get to the Anglican women’s dorm, they had to cross a bridge over that river.

But…

“Damn. I see silver armor. Is that the knights!?”

A truck was stopped at the end of the bridge. About eight heavily armored people were on the back of the truck. The people were either getting off the truck or setting up an inspection point. Either way, they had to do something about them in order to get across the bridge.

After silently watching the knights for a bit, Oriana pulled the booklet of flashcards from her pocket.

“From the looks of that girl, we don’t have time to wait around here.” She looked over at Lessar’s unconscious body for an instant and then back at the knights. “I’ll take care of them.”

“…Can you really do that?”

“Do you want me to do it or not?”

Oriana was smiling, but there was clear tension in her face.

Oriana Thomson was a courier and an expert at fleeing. She specialized in confusing her opponent and escaping, so she wasn’t used to taking opponents straight on and these were eight fully equipped knights.

Even so, she had said she would take care of them.

She would do it so that Kamijou could get over that bridge as quickly as possible with the injured Lessar.

“After you get that girl to the women’s dorm, head to Waterloo station in the

same borough.”

“What?”

“The Eurostar rail line connects directly to France by heading across the Strait of Dover using the Eurotunnel. The undersea tunnel isn’t being used due to the explosion, but it still connects to Folkestone where the entrance to the tunnel is.”

“You mean…”

“Folkestone is 100 kilometres from London. That isn’t a distance you can make on foot. …But that goes for the knights as well. They’ve taken control of the entire United Kingdom, so they now have to start transporting personnel and resources. You need to sneak aboard the Eurostar train the knights will be using.”

Kamijou nodded and turned his focus back to the bridge.

Even if they managed to get past the bridge, it wasn’t over. Knights were likely spread out in the area of the women’s dorm and, even once Lessar had been cared for, he had to rescue Index. To do that, he would have to sneak into the area where the second princess, the leader of the coup d’état that had taken control of the entire United Kingdom, was. It felt like a truly impossible task.

But…

(I have no choice.)

Kamijou looked down at Lessar’s unconscious form in his arms.

(This may seem like a hopeless situation, but for that very reason I can’t stop here!!)

Suddenly, Kamijou both heard and felt a low vibration. Oriana seemed to have sensed it as well and she was looking around with a puzzled expression.

Another vibration came.

This time the direction it came from was clearer. Kamijou looked in that direction.

A voice that was almost a moan escaped his lips.

“You’re kidding…”

Part 4

“Now then. The main problem is my mother and my sisters. We have to kill them. Only the Royal Family can control Curtana and I should really restrict who can use it further,” said Carissa as she exited the Eurotunnel.

The night was completely dark.

“I received a report that my mother was restrained at Windsor Castle, but we don’t know where Rimea is. Her distrust of humans is a result of her survival instincts. She probably didn’t come with us to the Eurotunnel because she sensed the danger. Also, I highly doubt she would let someone else know where her hideout is.”

“Lady Rimea also goes out into the city while hiding who she is. She may have a certain number of people who will shelter her without even knowing she is a princess.”

“Of course, she’s most likely in London or a nearby city.”

The second princess looked around the area.

Her eyebrows moved out of displeasure.

“Leaving the exceedingly competent first princess aside for a moment, where is that incompetent third princess?”

“About that…”

Knight Leader pointed towards the collection of carriages. The Royal Family's carriage and the ones for guards and assistants were lined up.

But one of them was missing.

Given the situation, it seemed likely that Third Princess Villian had left on it. But even after coming up with that answer, a puzzled look remained on Carissa's face.

"How did that sister of mine sense the danger? I thought her specialty was trusting people, not suspecting them."

"…"

Knight Leader hesitated to respond for an instant and Carissa spoke again before he could answer.

"I see, I see. Rimea has the intellect, I have the military, and she has her benevolence. Even if she's incompetent herself, she has no problem gathering skilled people around her."

As she spoke, Carissa walked in a different direction from the carriages. A number of servants who had been the ones to help Villian escape were already surrounded by fully equipped knights.

"It looks like there are no Royal Maids or armed aides among them. We might have had some trouble if a Saint like Silvia had been here."

"Lady Villian especially hates having military power. Most of the people here are commoners."

"Hmph. Is that why you're in such a bad mood? Regardless of what their position or social status may have been, there is no excuse for allowing my sister to sense the danger and get away."

"But…"

"I'm sure you've 'asked' them where Villian is headed and they didn't tell you anything. Otherwise, you wouldn't have reported that her destination is unknown."

The servants stood huddled together and Carissa pulled her sword from its scabbard.

This was the special sword with no blade or tip.

“Because of the sword’s form, it is called the Sword of Mercy, but I’m not so sure that’s accurate. Since you can’t slice through someone in a single strike with it, it seems much crueler to me.”

The servants watched her swing the sword up.

The sound of one of them gulping rang loudly through the darkness.

The second princess never intended to ask them any questions.

She was only intending to kill them.

However, Knight Leader stepped in between her and the trembling servants.

Carissa silently looked at the man blocking her way and stopped moving.

She spoke while barely moving her lips.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“I advise that you restrain your sword here.”

“I have no reason to listen to you.”

“In that case, feel free to cut me in two along with them.”

Carissa’s shoulders moved in response to his unhesitating words.

They were moving due to her laughter.

A few of the servants behind Knight Leader let out small screams upon seeing her smile. A smile could create fear. Her smile taught that well.

“…You aren’t being honest.” The second princess stared into Knight Leader’s darkness enjoying it from the bottom of her heart. “You determined that I still need you. Even though I have the freedom of being the second princess and now

the head of state, you see yourself as a trump card I have to protect. That's why you stood in front of those servants. …You're quite the skilled negotiator. It's true that I am currently not willing to kill you merely to kill some commoners."

"…"

"But keep one thing in mind."

The second princess's smile grew even wider.

The moonlight glittered on her sword and her expression resembled a split bag.

"That changes when it comes to my mother and my sisters. If you get in the way of their executions, I will cut straight through you. Their deaths are more important than you."

"…Understood," responded Knight Leader as if he were stifling his feelings. "I was merely suggesting that you avoid making unnecessary judgements. When the action is truly necessary, I have no reason to stop you."

"I hope you mean that."

The second princess returned Curtana Original to its scabbard, shrugged her shoulders, and left. Knight Leader threw a look at the knights surrounding the servants and they slowly spread out and away from the servants.

Without looking at the servants, Knight Leader spoke.

"Go."

"…Sir Knight Leader, I beg you. Please save Lady Vi-…"

"Hurry!!"

The servant stopped talking out of confusion over Knight Leader's explosive shout. She merely bowed her head and ran into the dark forest with the rest of the servants.

Left completely alone, Knight Leader had no knights to speak to.

He didn't once look in the direction of the servants and spat out some words.

“…If you want to kill me and stop this, bring *him* with you.”

Part 5

Kamijou Touma and Oriana Thomson saw something in front of the large stone bridge.

It was a giant made of stone over 4 meters tall. No, it was actually made of a collection of concrete and asphalt thrown together seemingly at random.

Kamijou recognized the golem made from various objects and materials as well as the gothic lolita magician controlling it.

“The golem Ellis…!? Sherry’s doing this!!”

A fierce roar rose as if in response to Kamijou’s voice.

The roar did not come from Ellis. Ellis did not have the ability to emit a voice.

The roar was being made by the lion-like magician controlling the golem.

“Gooooaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Sherry seemed to have lost herself in rage and Ellis attacked.

The giant unhesitatingly charged towards the knights panicking at that end of the bridge. The truck they were on exploded after the first strike and the knights were blown in all directions amidst orange flames. But that wasn’t enough to defeat those veteran knights.

“…”

Ellis raised one of its giant legs above one of the knights who was lying on the asphalt.

Ignoring the fact that the knight was attempting to defend himself using a mace, the golem forcefully dropped its leg down as if trying to pound a stake into the ground.

The tremendous shock almost knocked Kamijou and Oriana from their feet despite their distance from the scene.

The surrounding knights attacked with swords and spears in an attempt to save their comrade, but Ellis stomped on the collapsed knight a few more times despite being pierced by a multitude of blades.

Sherry's roar of rage resounded further.

(That's right! She-…!!)

Kamijou Touma recalled the meaning behind Sherry Cromwell's magic name.

About 20 years prior, a friend of hers named Ellis had been killed. The reason had been a political one, but it had been a group of knights that had directly carried out the killing.

A long time had passed and her wounds had healed to a certain extent, but now the knights had appeared before her again. And once again, they were acting tyrannically for political reasons.

After the first time, she had just barely managed to forgive them, so could she forgive them now that they had done it a second time?

The answer to that question was Sherry's current state.

"Dammit. She's completely snapped! She's pushing them back now because she had Ellis charge in, but they could turn this around pretty quickly if they aimed for Sherry herself!!"

"…Yes, this is bad," muttered Oriana.

Kamijou looked down at Lessar in his arms.

“What do we do? Do we help her!? At this rate, Sherry will-…!!”

“Idiot, we do the opposite!!” Oriana yelled back cutting off any further words from Kamijou. “That magician isn’t thinking of anything but killing as many of them as she can! Even if it gets her killed in the process!! If we leave her alone, the entire street could easily be destroyed along with knights!!”

Kamijou’s body stiffened.

There was even more tension in Oriana’s face than before.

“You use this confusion to get across the bridge and to the women’s dorm. … Onee-san will use the confusion to get an attack in on the knights. I’ll knock them out while they’re distracted by the golem and then look for a chance to bring that magician back to her senses!!”

“Can you really do that!? And all on your own!?”

“Would you rather abandon that girl and come with me?”

Oriana looked at Lessar’s unconscious form in Kamijou’s arms.

She then looked Kamijou straight in the eye.

“This is just an issue of assigning roles. Onee-san is being treated as a criminal, so if I headed for the women’s dorm with an enemy magician, they wouldn’t trust me, but they trust you enough that they will be more willing to use healing magic on her. Also, I really don’t think that right hand of yours is suited for fighting against a group.”

“Fuck,” Kamijou swore.

He wanted to stop Oriana from going, but he also couldn’t abandon Lessar.

“Can I really leave this to you, Oriana?”

“Of course.”

Kamijou and Oriana nodded once at each other and then headed out from cover.

The attack by the golem Ellis had driven the knights back a bit from the stone

bridge. Holding Lessar, Kamijou headed past them and towards the bridge. It seemed a few of them noticed him, but Ellis and Oriana cut in effectively preventing them from focusing on him.

Gritting his teeth at the explosions and vibrations he heard from behind him, Kamijou ran at full speed.

The stone bridge was over 200 meters long.

Lessar's body felt fairly heavy in his arms, but Kamijou somehow managed to get across the bridge.

That was when something unusual happened.

On the other side of the river, Ellis swung its giant arm around. A number of silver-armored knights were knocked away. At the same time, their swords and spears broke and flew through the air.

A professional magician may have noticed it then.

One of the broken spears was a spiritual item called Brionac.

Broken in half, the spear spun through the air and lightning-like flashes surged out from its tip.

It made no noise.

Only a tremendous light cut through the air. Five of what looked like beams of light shot out. The white flashes flew across the river occasionally taking a straight path and occasionally bending. They then pierced areas across the Borough of Lambeth.

A low vibration pierced into Kamijou's footing and his mind.

(The city…!!)

Without thinking, Kamijou stopped running and looked off into the distance. He couldn't tell much from where he was, but it at least didn't look like the buildings had crumbled into mountains of rubble.

He breathed a slight sigh of relief, but then he suddenly froze again.

He had noticed that a railroad overpass in the distance had been destroyed. The very structure of the overpass had been destroyed so it had fallen to the ground. The power cables had also been torn apart spreading sparks everywhere.

“Shit…”

Those power cables belonged to the Eurostar line, the line that connected to Folkestone where Index waited 100 kilometers away.

“What the hell am I supposed to do now!?”

Part 6

The search for Third Princess Villian began immediately.

To prevent various types of trouble, the carriages used by the Royal Family and its guards all had systems installed that allowed their locations to be detected. Knight Leader knelt on the asphalt road, placed his hand on it, and muttered something. When he did, a number of lines appeared along the road as if they had been painted on with luminous paint. They indicated where the carriages’ wheels had passed.

“Its distance is around 2000 meters. Its speed is 50 kilometers per hour. Given the direction, it seems she is heading to Canterbury via Dover in order to circumvent the mountains.”

“I see. The public headquarters of the Anglican Church is there. She’s realized that she won’t get help from the Royal Family or the knights, so she’s running to the church.” Carissa gave a small smile. “What shallow thinking.”

“Shall we pursue her?”

“First we need to make sure of one thing: Would the servants who provided her with the carriage have known about the tracking system? Is it possible they sent out a dummy?”

“They have seen magic, but they have never used it. As I told you, they are commoners.”

“In that case, I’ll have your head if this does turn out to be a dummy,” the second princess said lightly.

She then pushed the knights aside with just a glance and headed for the stopped carriages. However, she did not get on the extravagant carriage meant for the Royal Family. She instead chose a military horse that had been trained for skilled knights to use.

“Let’s go. We don’t have time to spend on my incompetent sister. We need to hurry up and kill her so we can solidify our new order. I doubt France would move this swiftly, but I would still rather not give them an opening.”

Knight Leader did not respond.

His face lifted up quickly like a wolf that had heard a small noise.

“What is it?”

“An aircraft,” he responded to Carissa’s question.

She looked around, but didn’t see anything of the sort. Knight leader then pointed towards his ear. Apparently, he really could recognize it by the sound.

“But this is odd. We currently control almost all of the transportation facilities. All of England’s airports, both civilian and military, have been shut down and the runways can’t be used.”

From atop the horse, the second princess held out her right hand and Knight Leader tossed her a pair of binoculars. Carissa caught them with one hand and looked around using them. Suddenly, she stopped on one spot.

“There it is. It’s flying at low altitude practically skimming the ground. …Are they trying to avoid being seen on radar?”

In the narrow view of the binoculars, she could clearly see a large airplane flying only about 5 meters above the asphalt. It appeared to be a transport plane and it had 4 propellers on its main wings.

Carissa moved her eyes from the binoculars and smiled.

“If that isn’t reinforcements from the knights, it’s been hijacked.”

“But the runways have all been blocked off! Even if someone forced their way through, we should have at least gotten a report of it!!”

“Recheck the communications spiritual items. They could have isolated the truly important signal and jammed it.” Carissa threw the binoculars back to Knight Leader. “…And there’s the answer to the runway issue. Look. There are floats on the bottom of the plane. It’s a sea plane. It can takeoff or land on a river or the sea instead of on a runway. …Come to think of it, there is a sea rescue craft moored at a lake in London’s Hyde Park for an event being held for airplane fans.”

“Let’s shoot it down,” said Knight Leader frankly.

“Too late. It’s already here,” responded Carissa from atop the military horse.

A strong blast of wind struck the dark forest.

The rescue plane was not so much flying through the air as it was traveling with its propellers like a hovercraft. The craft shot just above the ground at high speed like a bullet and flew right past the mass of knights.

As it did, a slide door in its side opened.

A figure unhesitatingly jumped from the plane into the middle of the knights.

The rescue plane was traveling at a speed greater than 500 kph.

The trajectory of the person falling from it was more like an impact from the side than a descent from above.

A normal person would certainly have become a stain on the road surface. In fact, it wouldn’t have been surprising if it had created a crater with a radius of a few meters.

But this person landed softly in the middle of the enemy lines.

Almost like a feather.

It was not an easy-to-understand battle performance from some sort of military exercise, but someone with an understanding of a certain level of martial arts would naturally be able to tell what incredible skill was hidden in all the small movements making up the phenomenon occurring there. It was that kind of action.

The knights hurriedly drew their swords to face the attacker who had suddenly appeared, but the figure standing amid them ignored them and glared in Carissa’s direction.

“A Saint, hm?” said Carissa quietly while being glared at. “In that case, the remaining Amakusas must be piloting that plane.”

“…We can discuss this afterwards.”

Surrounded by a large number of knights, Kanzaki Kaori reached for the hilt of her sword.

“I doubt it will actually stop all this chaos, but I have come to crush the leader of this coup d’état.”

“I’m not going to let that happen,” responded Carissa.

Hearing the second princess’s words, Knight Leader took a step forward as if to protect Carissa.

“I will take care of this.”

Carissa gave a snort of derision and gripped the reins of her horse. When she had the horse turn around and charged off in pursuit of the third princess, the look in Kanzaki’s eyes harshened.

However, Knight Leader stepped in from the side to obstruct Kanzaki’s path.

With her hand still on the hilt of her sword, Kanzaki exhaled unnaturally slowly.

“So you were so insistent in your invitation because you knew it would turn out like this.”

“I wasn’t lying when I said that I wished for you to be a lady.” Some emotion mixed into the light in Knight Leader’s eyes. “However, it seems I was too late for that as well. Now that you stand before me as my enemy, I will show no mercy.”

Part 7

Kanzaki Kaori was a Saint.

There were fewer than 20 Saints in the world. A Saint was a person who possessed a certain talent or bodily characteristics and so held similar magical symbols to the Son of God from the moment they were born. As such, they obtained a fragment of his power that they could freely control.

For most enemies, she didn't even need to draw her sword.

She had a hand-to-hand technique for semi-long distances called Nanasen that used wires and she could blow away most magicians by merely swinging Shichiten Shichitou's long scabbard.

(My enemy is the head of the knights, Knight Leader. I doubt he will be defeated so easily.)

Kanzaki paid close attention to Knight Leader's movements and poured strength into the fingers holding the hilt of her sword.

(It looks like I'm going to have to go all out here, but I don't want to kill him if I can avoid it… I'll knock him out with the scabbard and quickly capture the second princess!! That's the only way to quickly put a stop to this ridiculous rebellion!!)

But…

Something invisible was seeping from Knight Leader's body.

Knight Leader disappeared from Kanzaki Kaori's sight.

It took her an instant to realize that he had moved out of her vision at tremendous speed.

When she did, she heard the sound of slicing wind coming from directly behind her.

"!?"

She immediately turned around while bringing up her scabbard for defense.

Knight Leader had merely kicked.

Even so, Kanzaki's body of a Saint was blown away along with the guarding scabbard. While she was knocked back and lost her balance, Knight Leader sent his clenched fist into her gut.

A tremendous sound rang out.

Kanzaki's body was blown back 10 meters without landing and she struck one of the guard carriages. The carriage was protected by a number of spiritual items, but it was still smashed to pieces from the impact and Kanzaki's body slid along the ground after passing through it. The horses tied to the carriage panicked.

"Gah….Wha-…!?"

(I thought this was going to be an issue that normal methods weren't going to work on, but what's with this tremendous power…!?)

Including Saints, there was a maximum amount of power that a flesh-and-blood human could control, but he had clearly surpassed that.

(Don't tell me he's using the high-speed stability line like Acqua of the Back…!!)

Kanzaki was having trouble breathing as doubt entered her mind, but she didn't have time to think over it calmly.

Knight Leader had already jumped up 5 meters in the air and the soles of his shoes were approaching in order to crush her.

"!?"

Kanzaki immediately rolled to the side.

But even with her physical abilities as a Saint, she couldn't get to safety in time.

She avoided a direct hit, but the destroyed asphalt scattered around the area and struck her. Knight Leader looked silently down at Kanzaki as she rolled to the side with blood gushing from her. He was not watching her cautiously. His expression said that he saw no need to hurriedly pursue her.

“Why do you look so surprised?”

Knight Leader gently spread his arms wide towards Kanzaki who was completely on guard. He did not seem worried at all. He almost seemed disappointed.

“I am the head of the knights, one of the three factions. Even if you are a Saint, you are still just one member of the church. Did you really think you could fight on my level?”

“!!”

Without responding, Kanzaki fired off 7 wires.

Nanasen.

“…Long ago, an old friend of mine hit me with a dreadful surprise attack.”

Knight Leader did not seem worried. He held a hand up in the air, grabbed all of the wires fired towards him, and forcefully ripped them apart. He hadn’t used a weapon. In fact, he hadn’t even used both hands.

“Ever since, I have always been on the lookout for surprise attacks.”

While he spoke, Knight Leader “threw” the destroyed wires. Even if they were sharp, they were still basically just strings. They shouldn’t have had any power to them, but Kanzaki’s body flew back like a fired shell when they hit her.

“Gh…bh….!!”

This time, Kanzaki finally stopped moving when she struck a tree in the forest.

The destroyed wires were no longer wires. They had been gripped with such strength that the metal wires had been compressed into a single mass and fired like a bullet from a handgun.

“The one to stand before me should be, at the very least, the head of the Anglican Church,” Knight Leader said quietly as he cracked his knuckles. “No, the church simply does not have enough strength. I respect the Royal Family, but I stand above them when it comes to violence. Frankly speaking, you simply

aren’t up to the task.”

A tremendous sound rang out.

When Knight Leader’s body disappeared, he was already directly in front of Kanzaki. Immediately after she jumped to the side, his leg blew away the trunk of a large tree with a single strike. It didn’t break, it flew. As Kanzaki trembled at that destructive power, her hands subconsciously moved. They reached for the hilt of her sword.

(Oh, no…!!)

The reason a chill ran down her back was not due to a danger to her own life.

Her hands had already moved.

By the time she realized that, her right hand had already forcefully drawn her sword. She had used the true Yuisen. That ultimate attack that could cut down even a monotheistic angel flew straight for Knight Leader’s neck.

He was unarmed. He had nothing that even resembled a weapon and his suit was not a spiritual item.

And yet, with a tremendous noise, he grabbed Kanzaki’s sword with a single hand.

This time, it was bewilderment, not fear, that wrapped around Kanzaki’s entire body.

Having stopped her movement, Knight Leader spoke.

“Do you know why the longtime members of Necessarius did not begin a large-scale systematic resistance when we conquered the United Kingdom and instead quickly slipped into the darkness to wait for a better chance?”

Still grabbing the blade of her sword, he lifted one foot from the ground.

“It was because they knew that it was *absolutely impossible* for them to win in a straight fight against the knights while inside the United Kingdom.”

A loud explosive noise rang out.

It was the sound of Knight Leader kicking Kanzaki. The tremendous force caused Kanzaki to lose her grip on Shichiten Shichitou and her body was knocked a great distance.

“Our country was constructed around Curtana and the four cultures and so the entire United Kingdom itself is bound by a special Christian rule. When in this land, the monarch is the leader of the angels and the knights are angels. …As long as we are in the country, there is just a sheer difference in the amount of power. If you want to kill me, you should first drag me outside of the United Kingdom.”

“…Uuh…”

Kanzaki’s consciousness was wavering as she watched Knight Leader toss Shichiten Shichitou aside.

“Also, we of the knights do not believe in the Anglican Church that Henry VIII created for political reasons. We see it as no more than something to use. Our essence is a single ideology created from a synthesis of Norse, Celtic, Charlemagnic, Germanic, and all other paths of knighthood. …That attack just now seems to have been a strike that circumvents numerous spells in order to injure angels, but that kind of detour isn’t enough to circumvent my defenses.”

Kanzaki attempted to stand up, but no strength would enter her legs.

There were special circumstances in that situation, but even so, that was the most ridiculous enemy she had ever faced. She had previously fought an imperfectly manifested version of the Archangel Gabriel and Acqua of the Back who used that angel as a symbol, but she had at least been able to “fight” against them.

But with Knight Leader she couldn’t even do that.

And he did not even take pride in his strength.

“So you haven’t given up yet,” said Knight Leader narrowing his eyes out of disinterest. “In any case, a mere Saint cannot kill me with their special strength.”

As Kanzaki attempted to muster some more strength, Knight Leader casually

approached her directly from the front.

As he did, he spoke.

“And I haven’t even drawn my sword yet.”

He kicked Kanzaki.

It was not the kick of a martial artist. It was much like he was kicking a soccer ball.

Kanzaki’s body flew through the air and then rolled along the ground.

Knight Leader didn’t even look over in her direction and instead gestured at his subordinates. They all boarded carriages or mounted horses and headed in the direction the second princess had disappeared in.

Atop his horse, Knight Leader looked in Kanzaki’s direction for just an instant.

Seeing that she had completely lost consciousness, he spoke disinterestedly.

“So that’s all a Saint can do.”

Part 8

The third princess was in the carriage.

The carriage she was in was not one used by the Royal Family. But there were more practical designs on this slightly less extravagant carriage. It was a carriage for guards.

There were no drivers for the carriage.

The carriage was made by magic, and just by setting a destination the two horses would automatically run towards there. For Villian, who was not proficient at horse-riding, this was a fortunate function.

Villian, who was in a hurry, was so rushed she didn't even have time to turn on the lights. In the almost pitch-dark carriage, the only illumination came from the faint light of the artifacts that controlled the carriage.

(The Canterbury Cathedral…)

Villian wanted to go to the solemn church that was 10km ahead of her.

(First I'll escape there. Then if there is anyone from the Anglican Church left there, at least I can ask them to save the servants that sacrificed themselves to get captured in my stead …!!)

But, that hopefully would not come true.

Suddenly, the two horses that dragged the carriage ran off in opposite directions. The carriage got overturned by this violent power. Along with a *clonk* the third princess fell unconscious.

"Uu…"

Villian woke up after hearing many horses whinny.

In the overturned horse carriage, the controls were flashing the abnormal red light for emergencies.

At one of the corners, a voice came out of the communication artifact.

"Give up. It doesn't matter if you stay in there or come out, you will die. All you can do now is pray."

"… …!!"

The familiar voice of her older sister made Villian freeze up.

The communication artifact kept letting out Carissa’s heartless voice.

“Three.”

A countdown.

But this wasn’t for any kind of negotiation with Villian.

“Two.”

Either way, Carissa was not planning on letting Villian live.

In other words, this was only for tormenting Villian.

“One.”

Villian had decided.

Using common sense, even though it was overturned, inside of the carriage protected by wards was safer than going outside. Villian was completely different from her older sister in that she didn't know any combat spells.

“Zero.”

But, Villian suddenly reached for the door.

She opened the door of the overturned carriage like a submarine hatch and used all her strength to try and get out.

Immediately, the carriage came into contact with a massive amount of pressure.

The destructive power shattered the protective wards along with the carriage. The third princess who barely made it out fell to the ground, with no time to even check if she still had all her limbs.

“There’s no point in relying on those at the Canterbury Cathedral, you understand?”

Carissa’s voice reached her.

She was firmly seated on top of a warhorse, and looked down at Villian who was

still lying on the ground.

She held a sword in her hands.

Looking at the sword without a point at the end, Villian’s expression became bewildered.

(… That’s not… the Curtana Second…?)

“The guards' carriage going out of control wasn’t due to interference from my side. It was due to your destination. Canterbury blocked out its own coordinates… you should know why – you have been abandoned.”

“…?! What… what, how…?!”

“The ‘Royal Faction’ and the ‘Knights Faction’ are both now under my control. So I guess the ‘Anglican Church Faction’ decided to not take you in. It’s obvious now, you have no comrades left.”

From behind the second princess many light sources closed in. They were carriages and warhorses with flaming torches. The several tens of knights that had protected Villian for a long time were now serving under Carissa.

The third princess, who was immobilized by fear, had been surrounded by the knights.

One among them, Knight Leader, said to Carissa,

“I’ve defeated the saint. There are no more obstacles.”

“Hmph. Then, I have one more job for you.”

Carissa’s words made Villian tremble.

Knight Leader looked at Carissa. Facing Knight Leader, who was wearing a questioning expression, Carissa said,

“I’ve said it before, I will not tolerate any more of your foolishness when it comes to the third princess.”

“… Understood.”

While he replied, Knight Leader came down from his horse.

Villian could not believe it.

He was indeed the direct subordinate of Carissa, so it was only natural for him to listen to her orders. But, Villian had known Knight Leader not just for a day or two, but for over ten years.

She had been protected by him countless times.

At the balls, he was often there protecting her in the shadows. Several times that her political marriages had been stopped had probably been due to him working with much effort, where it would not be recorded in history.

She wouldn't be killed so simply. After all, this was the princess of 'virtue', as opposed to 'intelligence' or 'military affairs'.

Maybe, Knight Leader was only just acting.

Pretending to kill her, fooling the second princess, then letting her escape.

With these thoughts, rather than saying she was being optimistic, it was more like she was escaping from reality.

After that, unavoidable despair shattered those thoughts instantly.

"… Using a sword to perform the execution will harm the blade. Bring the axe used for executing royalty and nobility. The heavier it is the more cleanly it will cut. Even in death, a princess is still a princess. To let the citizens see a soiled head is a shame for the princess."

The request that Knight Leader made toward his subordinates made Villian dumbstruck.

"… … …"

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out of it.

A fully armored knight handed him an axe. The axe-blade was about a meter long. The face of the axe that had absorbed so much blood seemed to be heavy

without peer.

Knight Leader wordlessly took the axe, and looked around the vicinity once more. There was no other light. Apart from them there was nobody else.

Knight Leader closed his eyes and sighed.

He showed an expression as if he was expecting something.

Then it turned into an expression that looked slightly disappointed.

“Let’s start.”

He opened his eyes, and intoned in a low voice.

With a slow *clunk*, Knight Leader raised the axe to shoulder height, then high above his head.

“Uu, Uwa… Uwaaaaahhhh!?”

Villian could not utter a word, and could only yell out on the ground.

But Knight Leader’s expression did not waver.

He only aimed his axe at Villian’s neck. With his skills, even without someone holding her down he could still execute her cleanly.

Only Carissa said in a slightly melancholic voice,

“You can ask for help if you want, after all there’s so many people here. However, no one will answer you.”

That sentence was what made Villian feel the most pain.

There were so many people in this world, and so many with power and strength; yet none of them were willing to step out for her. Villian, who was surrounded by so many knights armed with many different weapons, was so alone. As if showing the demise for fallen royalty, who was overwhelmingly alone.

Tears flooded out of her eyes.

Was it because of fear? Because of sadness? Or because of shame?

The eyebrows of Knight Leader twitched for an instant, as if reflecting what was in his heart.

“… Farewell. I’ll promise you one last thing. I will treat your head with the utmost honour. The flesh and skin will be preserved just as when you were alive… no, even more beautiful than you are now. That way, the citizens who see your severed head will definitely feel sympathy for you.”

After those last words, Knight Leader banished all doubts and swung the axe down at the Third Princess Villian with both hands.

Doubts would only bring her unnecessary pain.

At the same time,

With a *boom*, a frightening attack struck the Knights.

Whole rows of knights were blown to the ground, and the execution axe in Knight Leader’s hands was shattered.

At this instant,

Among the knights who were blown away, a few of them blankly whispered,

“…He’s back?”

At this instant,

The second princess Carissa, who was still on her horse and wielded the Curtana Original, said in a calm manner,

“He’s back?”

At this instant,

Knight Leader readily threw away the axe handle and faced the worthy opponent in front of him. A smile had risen on his face and he shouted,

“He’s back!!”

Then, countless mouths had opened,

People, or a better word - everyone, said that name,

“ “ “ **William Orwell!!** ” ” ”

The Third Princess Villian could still not understand what had just happened.

Her body that had been on the ground just a moment ago was now floating in the air. No, not floating, in the arms of a certain man. The strong man who had picked up the third princess single-handedly had an enormous sword in his other hand. This over-sized weapon was over 3 meters in length, and was held easily in his hand.

Inscribed on the side of the large sword was ‘Ascalon’.

And at the base of the sword, there was something else.

Something that should have been hung up on a corridor at the Buckingham Palace, a crest that had never seen the light of day. With green on a blue background, and a dragon, a unicorn and a silky crest – the mercenary’s crest.

Villian recognized it.

She knew this man’s name.

“Are you alright, princess of this country?”

He used the short speech to convey the minimal amount of courtesy. This mercenary didn’t like to say needless words. After hearing these straightforward words, the third princess finally knew what was going on.

The master of the arm that was holding her had stepped up for Villian.

Even though the ‘Royal Faction’, the ‘Knight Faction’, and the ‘Anglican Church Faction’ had deserted her, only this mercenary stepped up for her.

“… Too slow…”

In front of this fact, tears flowed endlessly from Villian’s eyes.

But now it was completely different from before.

The reason for the tears had changed completely.

That her eyes could actually produce this much tears surprised her.

She could not hold her feelings in, and let them burst out of her. Even as large teardrops flowed down her cheeks she yelled out with all her strength,

“Too slow!! You idiot mercenary!”

Thus, the sheep and the princess were sent to the home of the dragon.

The Princess grieved for her own fate.

At this time, a wandering knight riding a horse to her side.

He wielded a holy sword along with a lance, and was a Knight among the Knights.

His name, supposedly, was St. George.

Epilogue: Everyone's Expectations and In Their Hearts. *War_in_Britain.*

A carriage was headed down a dark forest road with no street lights. The carriage held an old lamp and was like something one would see in a picture book. The Queen of England and the Archbishop were the ones sitting in that 4-seat carriage which may have been perfect material for a picture book as well.

However, they were restrained to their seats with 50 different restraints, so it wasn't exactly the kind of story one would tell a child as a bed-time story. Add in that fact that London had been conquered in a coup d'état and that they were being transported as prisoners and it seemed more like a nightmare.

Elizard and Laura were sitting next to each other and a knight was sitting in the opposing seat as an escort.

"…So in the end, almost all the knights fell to Second Princess Carissa's side. You're a surprisingly unpopular queen."

"Yes, well you're the head of the church, but not a single magician from Necessarius seems to have come to rescue you. Have they simply abandoned you or is this a reversal of trust? It's really hard to tell."

Both of the faction leaders had been hoping for rescue from the other's faction and they sighed now that they realized that wasn't going to happen. It was a light sigh similar to when a taxi drives right past one's outstretched hand attempting to wave it down.

Laura attempted to move her restrained body emitting a creaking noise.

"Nhh. They must be experts at this to accentuate my breasts by binding me above and below them. But they shouldn't take the Archbishop of the Anglican Church lightly!!"

“…Well, I’m sure you’re fine since pads can’t feel pain.”

“You fool!! These are real! Wait, no, not that. Study the history of restraints and you’re studying the history of the witch hunts. In other words, all the restraints, torture devices, and execution devices developed in this country have been influenced by us. As such, it would be quite odd if I didn’t know how to remove them, don’t you think?”

Hearing that, the escorting knight half-rose to his feet, but the queen responded coldly to the Archbishop.

“I really doubt you can do that.”

“Wha-?”

“I’ve known you for a long, long time. I know you want to show off, but I can already tell you’re just going to fail, so let me put an end to this before you get people’s hopes up: Stop. If you try, you’re just going be struggling against your restraints grunting after 30 seconds. I know you can’t stand feeling like you’re being attacked from all sides at once, so don’t force yourself.”

“I-I can do it!! I’m the Archbishop of the Anglican Church and the head of Necessarius! Someone like that has to be able to deal with all the different forms of magic from all over the world!!”

“…Yes, yes. And that idea is what is pressuring you into this. I completely understand.”

“Wh-what-!? O-okay then!! I’ll show you! It’s show time!!”

As Laura Stuart shouted while restrained to her seat by 50 different restraints, her oddly long blonde hair started glowing for some reason.

The escorting knight started to reach for his sword thinking she was going to have her hair move and unlock the restraints or something, but something else happened.

Simply put, the glow turned into a flash.

To be a little more descriptive, the carriage was filled with a golden flash so

bright the knight couldn’t open his eyes. It felt like something was about to explode.

The knight yelled out without thinking.

“G-gwaaaahhh!? Y-you idiot! I thought you were going to pull some kind of escape artist trick, but that’s just an explo-…!!”

“Quiet!! As long as I can remove all 50 restraints, I win!!”

With the pleasant sound of an explosion, the carriage itself blew up from the inside.

The two horses pulling the carriage let out a whinny at the shock and the momentum of the explosion sent the driver splashing into a nearby river. With the wreckage spread around like a flower, Laura Stuart stood tall with her hands on her hips in the center of the carriage that now had no wheels.

“Hm, this was because it was restrained by hair pins. This much was to be expected.”

“…I-I see. I now have a much better idea of how little common sense you have,” groaned the queen who was still bound to the chair that was now on its side. “Well, as long as you have your restraints off, that’s enough. Hurry up and remove mine. We need to get away from here before the other knights sense something is wrong and-...”

“Hmm, I wonder what I should do regarding your restraints…”

“…Hey.” Elizard asked a serious question as a chill ran down her back. “You understand the current situation, right? If what those knights were saying is true, almost all of the United Kingdom has been conquered by this coup d’état. My daughter Carissa is behind it and she might very well cut ties with Academy City and then fire a missile at France. We need to do our best to overcome this seemingly hopeless situation, so this is no time for this…”

“Yeah, but your heartless words really hurt me. Hmm, I know. If you put me at ease by saying ‘I’m so very sorry, oh great Archbishop. A small person like me can only rely on the advice of the church’, then I might be able to cool my head and make a rational decision here.”

“Wh-why you…!!”

Elizard’s cheeks twitched, but arguing wasn’t going to get her anywhere. It was the Queen Regnant’s duty to put the future of the country ahead of her personal pride. She had no choice but to give in to the demand. However, just when the queen had accepted that terrible fate, she heard a snapping noise.

It seemed the chair hadn’t been able to withstand Laura’s explosion. Cracks spread through it and the restraints holding Queen Elizard broke.

“…”

“…”

Elizard and Laura remained silent for a short time.

Finally, the queen slowly stood up and wiped the dirt from her luxurious dress. She then reached down towards something that had fallen to the ground with the wreckage of the carriage.

“Oh, look. It’s Curtana Second.”

“Wait, wait! I’m sorry for getting carried away, so don’t turn that national treasure of a sword on me!!”

“Don’t worry, don’t worry. This sword is not made to harm people. It’s a ceremonial sword with no tip and no blade, remember? …It only has enough power to sever dimensions, so you have nothing to worry about.”

“I’m dead!? Wait, it still has that much destructive power left after having most of its power taken by the Original!?”

Laura shrunk down and trembled, but the queen wasn’t really going to slice her open. The queen returned Curtana Second to its scabbard and sighed out of exasperation.

“But since we need to be in London, this was rather pointless. You could have at least waited until we were in the capital.” Elizard looked around. “The carriage was completely destroyed, but we can still travel on foot.”

“…I-in that case, I have a brilliant plan.”

Laura slowly stood back up and looked out into the darkness.

What looked like a car’s headlights could be seen approaching from the distance.

Elizard looked on in shock.

“D-don’t tell me you’re referring to that legendary plan!!”

“Tah dah!! It’s the hitchhiking plan!! Hey, you. The guy driving that filthy truck! Would you be interested in going for a drive with a beautiful girl!?”

Laura Stuart was sticking out the thumb of her right hand and gave a bewitching wink.

The truck came to a stop 50 meters ahead of her, made a slow U-turn, and left with proper driving technique.

Laura Stuart spoke while the wink and a giant smile remained on her face.

“…Let’s kill him.”

“You idiot, he made the right decision.”

Elizard looked through the useless wreckage of the carriage and suddenly spotted a spiritual item. It seemed to be what the knights had used for communications.

“I see. William Orwell has returned with Ascalon.”

“The Roman Catholic Church’s Acqua of the Back, huh? As the head of the Anglican Church I have mixed feelings about that, but a mercenary who isn’t controlled by what the knight’s want is the perfect right-hand man for Third Princess Villian. It looks like there may be some hope left.”

“The perfect right-hand man, hm?” muttered the queen as she tossed the communications spiritual item to the side. “…Will this really proceed so simply?”

“I don’t like how you always say small meaningful-sounding things that only

you understand. What exactly are we going to do? Don’t tell me we’re going to trudge through this dark forest on foot.”

“Hmph. Why did you have to ruin the mood like that,” spat out Elizard as she looked around the area.

Elizard’s eyes stopped on the horses that had been pulling the carriage. The devices tying them to the carriage had broken off. The queen cleared the devices away and easily mounted the horse despite its lack of a saddle.

The long reins were made for the carriage’s driver to use them, but Elizard forcibly gathered them up to make them easier to use while on horseback. Seeing this, Laura’s expression turned to one of clear displeasure.

“Ehhh? I don’t know how to do anything as uncivilized as riding a military horse.”

“Okay, let’s go. Our destination is London!”

“You’re clearly planning on leaving me behind!! Wait, wait, I’ll really be all alone and as we saw hitchhiking is impossible!!”

Kamijou Touma somehow managed to reach the Anglican women’s dorm.

It was the first time he had been in the building, but he didn’t have time to look around. All the truly necessary things had already been taken away from the dorm and most of the people had already fled. The only remaining people were battle personnel who were staying behind as a rear guard to buy time before the knights could attempt pursuit. Kamijou felt kind of bad about having to ask them to heal an enemy magician like Lessar, but then…

“Oh, long time no see.”

“Eh? Orsola!? Why is someone with zero battle ability, and thus the first person who should have fled, still here!?”

“Everyone was making such a commotion and I just couldn’t keep up with them.”

That nun who seemed unbelievably slow was Orsola Aquinas an acquaintance of Kamijou's. She was a large-breasted woman who specialized in the deciphering of grimoires.

She looked down at Lessar's limp form in his arms.

"Oh, my. I see you're having the usual type of thing happening to you."

"…I'm not quite sure what you mean by that, but can I leave her with you?"

"Okay, you need her healed with magic, correct?" she responded readily.

Kamijou handed the New Light girl to Orsola. It seemed the nun wasn't good at constantly changing high-speed battles, but she had a certain amount of skill when it came to work that could be done slowly. She wasn't an expert at healing magic, but she could at least carry out emergency aid by reconnecting torn blood vessels.

"And will you be doing anything in return…?"

"I know, I know. I'll help with the escape as a member of the rear guard," Kamijou responded while loosely clenching his right hand.

Imagine Breaker could get in the way of the spell, so he left Orsola. He walked through a dark passageway with the lights out and ran into a nun (this one with a tense expression) who had stayed behind as a member of the rear guard.

She had blonde hair and blue eyes and she went out of her way to speak to him in Japanese.

"Including the back entrance you came in through, almost all of the routes have been fortified by the knights. It looks like forcing our way out is the only option. …Will you help us?"

"What's the plan?"

"After shaking the knights with all the long distance bombardments we can muster, we will scatter and force our way out and escape in all directions. The enemy's faltering and hesitation will buy us a little bit of time, but it's impossible to know who will end up drawing the short straw."

(That’s rather vague as usual.)

“What exactly are the knights trying to accomplish with this coup d’état? The country was already having problems acquiring resources, so why would they isolate themselves further…?”

“From what we can gather from the communications we’ve intercepted, they seem to have their eye on ocean resources,” said the nun. “The United Kingdom’s level of self-sufficiency isn’t all that low. There are various barriers produced by everyday life, but people won’t start starving right away. Queen Elizard was acting carefully to ensure the people’s dissatisfaction did not turn to rioting, but Second Princess Carissa seems to be pushing in an entirely different direction.”

“So she went with a forced subjugation using military force on a national scale…”

“The most worrisome aspect regarding the food supply is that about half of seafood consumed here is imported, but something could be done about that by reopening the closed ports. At any rate, with the real risk of hundreds or thousands of people being slaughtered, the people are unlikely to riot. Normally, people can put up with most things while they have the tip of a sword sticking into their side.”

“But food isn’t the only problem. What about oil or metals like iron?”

“It seems they truly believe it can be mined from undersea mountains. The United Kingdom is an island nation protected by a natural barrier of ocean, but that barrier has been strengthened by installing various devices on the ocean floor. Carissa and the knights could be secretly preparing to turn those into large-scale mining facilities. However, if it was all really that easy, I doubt the queen would have been so worried about the explosion in the undersea tunnel.”

The nun changed the subject back to an actual strategy.

“After we break through the knights surrounding the women’s dorm, we will head to a designated rendezvous point, but you should probably head for Waterloo Station. …I more or less understand the situation. Don’t worry. The Eurostar line will take you in a straight shot to Folkestone where Index Librorum Prohibitorum is.”

“…That’s gonna be tough,” said Kamijou with a bitter look on his face. Index’s face floated up to the top of his mind. “A stray shot from a battle a bit ago tore apart the overhead structures and the power lines. That train isn’t going anywhere.”

It was over 100 km from London to Folkestone. It was simply too far to travel on foot, so he had to use the train.

“Not necessarily,” said the nun and Kamijou looked back at her. “Even if they have Curtana Original, the ultimate leader of the knights, Second Princess Carissa, is currently wide open in Folkestone and unable to get to a special fortress. To deal with the combined forces of us with the church, the knights have to transport personnel and materials to quickly fortify a defensive position. In other words, they need to get a train down there.”

“Meaning…?”

“There are diesel engines used to pull trains in case of power issues. Even if the power cables were cut, it can still move. The knights will most likely use a crane to get the train past the area with the structural damage and then go from there. If you can sneak onto the train…”

A path to Folkestone had opened up.

Strength naturally gathered in Kamijou’s right fist as he heard the nun’s words.

Seeing that, the nun gave a small smile.

“…Of course, all of this depends on first escaping from here safely.”

“This is perfect. …As long as I have clear objectives, I’ve pretty much already won.”

Kamijou and the nun then began preparing for battle.

A certain man came to the southern English city of Folkestone.

William Orwell.

Seeing the large man come running to save Third Princess Villian with the spiritual item known as Ascalon in hand, Second Princess Carissa smiled thinly.

That man annoyed her greatly because he was uninfluenced by the various organizations and he would unhesitatingly destroy the carefully laid out plans of even the Royal Family because it was “for England”.

She had a thought while everyone was left speechless at the appearance of that mercenary.

(Ascalon? A sacred sword spiritual item made according to the legend of St. George?)

Carissa knew that man was naturally skilled with water and that he had to be overwhelmingly powerful due to his strength from his mercenary days being furthered evolved as a member of God’s Right Seat.

(Why did he need to prepare something like that? Folkestone is a port city and a mountain with a water source that isn’t far away. The water he is so skilled with should be all over the place, so why is he relying on such an obvious weapon like Ascalon?)

She also knew the reason the mercenary was not using water. A pipeline still existed between England and Academy City. As such, they had received information that the man known as Acqua of the Back who had control of the power of Gabriel had attacked Academy City and had been defeated.

(He’s wounded meaning he can’t control water. That’s why he has to rely on a spiritual item as over the top as Ascalon. If he’s lost some of his power leaving him at the level of a mere Saint, Knight Leader is enough to deal with him. And Knight Leader’s power isn’t just theoretical. He has been tested in his fight against the Saint from the Far East.)

Having checked the information she already had with the information she was currently gathering with her own eyes, Carissa smiled.

She came up with an overall conclusion.

(Right now, we can kill him. We can kill that annoying mercenary.)

Afterword

To those who have bought the books one at a time: Welcome back.

To those that have bought and then read through all 19 books: Welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

Volume 17 contained tons of England which had been mentioned and seen here and there previously. With the royal family, the knights, the church, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the magic cabals, and even the dangerous actions between nations, a lot was packed into this volume.

As this was a story about England, it of course had knights and princesses in it.

St. George is the English name of a real saint. With the help of Haimura-san, the story in the opening art and the main text was based on the real legend with some changes to fit more with the English knights and to make it more picture book-like.

By the way, (and a certain character mentions this a bit) the historical St. George's sword was apparently not named Ascalon and the knight and princess outfits were made more picture book-like. Just think of it as a story from a picture book from within the world of the series.

Many thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and my editor Miki-san. I am truly thankful that they went along with my special experiment with the opening art.

I would also like to thank all of the readers. Thanks to all of your support as you flip through these pages, it looks like I'll be able to write a 20th book.

And now you will be closing the pages.

I pray that you will be able to take the 20th volume in to your hands.

And I will lay my pen down for now.

Next up is the battle between knight and mercenary!!

-Kamachi Kazuma

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 17

Author: **Kamachi Kazuma**

Illustrator: **Haimura Kiyotaka**

Translated by **Js06**, **PikachuWei**, **Dark Glass** & **Flere821**

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Prologue  - Wilfriback — Completed
Chapter 1 - Part 1 - PikachuWei;
            Part 2 - Dark Glass;
            Parts 3+ - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 2 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 3 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 4 - Part 8 - Flere821;
            The Rest - Js06 — Completed
Epilogue  - Js06 — Completed
Afterword - Js06 — Completed
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